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FLUSH FRED'S FULL HAND: Or, LIFE AND STRIFE IN LOUISIANA.

BY EDWARD WILLETT,

AUTHOR OF "MISSISSIPPI MOSE," "BUCK FARLEY," "BILL, THE BLIZZARD," ETC., ETC., ETC.



AS SOUL RAISED THE REPTILE, THE PISTOL WAS FIRED WITH QUICK AND CERTAIN AIM, SENDING THE SEVERED HEAD WHIRLING THROUGH THE AIR.

Flush Fred's Full Hand;

OR,

Life and Strife in Louisiana.

BY EDWARD WILLETT,

AUTHOR OF "FLUSH FRED," "MONTANA NAT,"
"BILL, THE BLIZZARD," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DEAD AT THE POST OF DUTY.

THE good steamer Sabine, Captain Spillers, was slowly making her way down the lower Mississippi.

Slowly, because the river was at an uncertain stage.

There had been a big rise, accompanied by an extensive inundation, and while it lasted the largest boats had been free to go wherever they pleased, as long as they kept between the two banks; for the channel was everywhere, and there was no danger of getting out of it.

But when the water began to decline, it fell very rapidly, and the chutes or short cuts that could have been taken a few days previous to the present trip of the Sabine were not then practicable.

The channel, too, had suffered many and great changes, and was still changing continually, as it always does on a falling river, so that pilots who had known it "like a book" before the "fresh" were disposed to feel their way dubiously, and indisposed to rely upon their previous knowledge.

Darkness also added to their difficulties, the night being moonless and starless, and the jackstaff scarcely visible from the pilot-house.

Down below all was light and jollity, and the passengers who had gathered in the Social Hall gave no thought to the perplexities of the pilots over their heads.

Several of them were playing cards, and at one table a game that had been in progress between four men of gentlemanly appearance and manners had been brought to a close.

All had risen from the table, and one of them, a tall and handsome young man, with dark eyes and hair, was emptying into his pocket a good-sized "pot" which he had just won.

"If you should happen to want your revenge at any time, gentlemen," said he, "you will find me always ready to accommodate you."

He slightly lifted his hat, and went out forward.

He was followed by the glance of one of the party—an elderly gentleman, with white hair and ruddy complexion, whose attire and bearing bespoke him a person of wealth and consideration.

"Who is that young man?" inquired the old gentleman.

"Thought you knew him, Mr. Delarosse," replied another of the party.

"I have been about so little of late years—that is, in my own country—that I hardly know anybody. Who is he, Peters?"

"His name is Fred Henning, and he is known on the river as Flush Fred. He is a professional gambler; but you wanted a lively game, and nobody could give you better satisfaction in that way than he could."

"That is all right. I am not ashamed of my company. Gamblers should not be choosers, anyway, and a professional ought to be as good as an amateur, if not a little better. I like the young fellow's looks, and I like his style, and I was quite willing that he should win my money. Will you join me, gentlemen, in drinking the health of the man who got the best of us?"

The subject of this conversation, after a glance from the guards at the blackness of the night, had mounted to the hurricane roof, from which elevation he surveyed the surroundings of the Sabine more carefully.

Then he mounted the texas, and ascended the stair that led to the pilot house.

It was Sam Byrne's watch as pilot, his partner being not only off duty, but suffering with a severe chill.

Sam and his cub, Joe Pettus, were the only persons in the pilot house when Flush Fred entered, and both were gazing intently into the darkness ahead, as if they could see anything there.

"Glad to see you, Fred," said the pilot as he glanced hastily at the new-comer. "This is better luck than I had looked for."

"I have been busy raking in some ducats, or I would have come up before," answered Fred Henning. "Shan't I order something for us, Sam?—something cool with a straw in it?"

"Not just now. I've got a sweetener of a job before me—all I can attend to. I say, Fred, I want to test that memory of yours that you brag of. You were with me the last time I ran Paddy White's chute. Do you remember how I raised the towhead?"

"By a patch of cloud under the moon, right ahead of the jackstaff!" promptly replied Fred.

"Right you are. There's no moon to-night, and the patch of cloud was top of a big sycamore; but it's there yet. Can you see it?"

"What are you giving me, Sam Byrne?"

demanding Fred. "Do you mean to say that we are that near to Paddy White's?"

"We are just at the head of the chute. Use your eyes."

"And are you going to run the chute this dark night, and on a falling river?"

"You may bet your bottom dollar that I am. It is a big cut-off, and when we are through it I can trust Joe Pettus or any other baby to steer the Sabine."

"I suppose you know what you are doing, Sam Byrne? What are your marks?"

"After we pass the towhead, as you know, the chute is straight and easy enough until we reach the bar, and I have learned from an up-river boat that the bar is now just opposite the old tree on the false point at the right. There ought to be seven feet now. If there's less than that I must shove her over for all she's worth. After we pass the bar and the bend the bottom drops out of the chute."

Fred Henning lighted a cigar. He had the most serene and implicit confidence in Sam Byrne.

That was exactly the kind of confidence the pilot had in himself, and he was as calm and placid as a May morning, though he was about to enter on the performance of a pretty risky exploit.

He rung the bell to slow, and then to stop, and the motion of the boat was scarcely perceptible at that lofty elevation.

She was simply drifting with the swift current of the river—drifting steadily into a bank of blackness, where it would seem that more than human eyes were needed to distinguish as much as an outline of anything.

Suddenly the pilot whirled the spokes of the big wheel to the right, and put his weight upon them.

The boat answered admirably, and her head swung around as if she would thrust the bank of blackness to one side.

Fred Henning stood behind Byrne, and said nothing, as he gazed intently ahead, his eyes gradually adapting themselves to the surroundings.

On each side the blackness became, if possible, denser, and it was evident to an experienced person that the Sabine had passed the towhead, and fairly entered the chute.

The young cub pilot stood with his hands in his pockets, staring blankly and uselessly, as to his vision there was nothing but utter darkness in any direction.

Under the direction of the pilot-house bell, the wheels began to churn the water again, and the big boat moved more rapidly down the chute, steadily shoving the bank of blackness ahead, but leaving it fairly caked at each side.

The pilot pulled the big bell forward, and a deck-hand came out below, and began to throw the lead.

Again the bell was struck, and another man went forward with the larboard lead.

They were not visible; but their sing-song was clearly audible in the night air at the pilot-house.

Plenty of water was what they reported at first; but it soon began to shoal.

"Now we're coming to it, Fred," said Byrne, in a whisper, as he rung the stopping bell.

"Can I help you?" asked Fred.

There was no answer.

Suddenly the grasp of the pilot's hands on the wheel relaxed, and he gasped audibly.

Then he fell backward heavily upon the floor.

CHAPTER II.

CRAWLING OVER A BAR.

FLUSH FRED stepped upon the bench instantly, and seized the wheel.

He could not stop to discover what was the matter with Byrne—to learn whether he was living or dead.

The lives of a boat-load of passengers were to be considered, rather than the life of any one man.

It was to be supposed that Byrne was dead, as he did not move after he struck the floor.

Fred Henning was no pilot.

In the mere act of steering he was sufficiently an adept, having practiced it on many boats and in the company of various pilots.

He had, moreover, an excellent memory, and the amount of river lore he had accumulated was something remarkable.

But he was no pilot.

Yet at the moment the entire responsibility for the safety of the Sabine and her passengers and crew and cargo was thrown upon him.

Everything depended on his head and his hands; but he did not flinch.

The best that could be done by a man in his position he would do, and it would not be his fault if he should fail.

He was glad that he had asked Byrne how he intended to run the chute, and he strained his eyes to catch a glimpse of the dead tree on the false point.

It was like looking through the wall of a house; but he meant to find that tree.

In this he was assisted by the leadmen, who reported the water shoaling as the steamer floated down the chute, and this meant that she was nearing the bar.

Young Joe Pettus, quite off his head, had run out of the pilot-house as soon as Fred Henning grabbed the wheel.

His first impulse was to seek the captain, and he met him coming up to the hurricane roof.

"That you, Joe?" demanded Captain Spillers.

"Where are we? What is Mr. Byrne doing?"

"In Paddy White's chute, and Mr. Byrne is dead or in a fit."

"Hell's delight!" exclaimed the frightened captain, as he brushed by the boy, and gained the hurricane deck.

"Hell's delight! Who's got the wheel?"

"Flush Fred," answered Joe.

Captain Spillers drew a long breath of relief.

It was at least better than nothing that somebody was there, and Fred Henning was a cool and clear-headed man.

The captain cast a quick glance up at the pilot-house, and walked forward.

He could only wait and hope.

Fred was sure that he had his eyes glued to the dead tree on the false point, and he coolly listened to the cry of the leadmen.

"Eight and a half!"

"Eight feet!"

Fred rung the go-ahead bell, and spoke to the engineer through the speaking-tube.

"Seven and a half!"

"Seven feet!"

"Crack onto her, Jim!" shouted Fred down the tube. "Give her oceans of it!"

"Six and a—"

The cry was drowned by the roaring of the steam as it rushed out of the escape-pipes in great white clouds. The boat stopped with a shock that sent it over all through her.

She had struck on the bar.

Just then the other pilot, who had been roused by Joe Pettus, came staggering up into the texas, without hat or coat or shoes, his face so white that it fairly shone in the darkness.

He was dazed by what he saw and could guess, and was as helpless as a baby.

But the big wheels of the Sabine were churning the chute like mad, and she "bumped herself," and fairly crawled over the bar until she slid into the deepening water beyond.

"Eight feet!" cheerily cried the leadman.

"All right, Jim!" shouted Fred through the speaking-tube.

"Quarter less twain!"

Fred struck the big bell, and the leadman's song ceased.

The danger was over, and the bend was successfully rounded, and the Sabine steamed gayly down the chute and into the broad river.

Captain Spillers came up, and the pilot-house was soon crowded with men from below, including a physician who happened to be among the passengers.

But there was nothing that could be done for Sam Byrne.

Heart disease was announced as the cause of his death, and he was supposed to have been dead when he struck the floor.

"Poor Sam Byrne!" exclaimed the captain.

"This will be sad news to send back to his wife and babies."

The dead pilot was carried below, and praises were poured in upon the man who had taken his place.

"Go back to your berth, Mr. Saunders," said Fred Henning to the remaining pilot. "You are not fit to be on duty now. I will whirl this wheel until morning, with Joe Pettus to help me, and then you may be well enough to get about."

The next day, when Flush Fred had got up and was stirring about, he discovered that he was the lion of the hour in the cabin.

The tragic fate of the pilot had of course made a great sensation on board the Sabine, and with it had naturally been connected the exploit of the man who had jumped into his tracks and performed the difficult task that death had prevented him from executing.

It was not alone the daring of the act, but the coolness and quite unexpected skill that had entered into the exploit, and, above all, the fact that the hero of the occasion had saved the boat, and possibly many lives.

On the spur of the moment a purse was raised by the passengers to show their appreciation of Fred Henning's courage and skill; but he accepted it only on the condition that he should be allowed to turn it over to the family of the dead pilot.

This increased his popularity, and the Sam Byrne fund, thus started, was speedily raised to a very pretty sum.

Captain Spillers, who fully understood and admitted the nature and value of Fred Henning's service, was not at all backward in giving him the credit that was his due.

Among those who praised and congratulated the temporary pilot no person was more enthusiastic than Mr. Delarosse, the Louisiana gentleman who had lost money to him at cards the night before.

"I am glad to know you, Mr. Henning," said the old gentleman. "Begad, sir, I am proud to have made your acquaintance, and it is not every man that Leon Delarosse considers worth

knowing. I wish I had your nerve and your pluck, and I wish I had your youth and spirit, and, begad, sir, I wish I could play poker with your dash and spirit. I want to introduce my nephew to you, if you are willing. Here, Paul!"

A young man who was about the age of Fred Henning stepped forward gracefully, but with a frown on his face.

He was not a young man of prepossessing appearance, though he was faultlessly dressed, and his style, at least on the outside, was that of a well-bred gentleman.

His dark eyes were small and restless, and his brow was low, and his black mustache gave his face a sinister look, perhaps due to the sneer that usually lurked under it.

Flush Fred was prepared to dislike him as soon as he saw him, and this feeling was doubtless reciprocated by the other.

"This is my nephew, Paul Delarosse," said the old gentleman. "As he has been educated abroad, he is not very well acquainted with his native country, and I want him to see what fine specimens of manhood America can produce. This gentleman, Paul, is Mr. Fred Henning, who saved the boat and her passengers, last night, when the pilot was struck dead at his post. We can well boast of our young men here, when they can do such daring and skillful deeds as that."

Paul Delarosse spoke with a slightly Frenchified accent, and his sneer was quite perceptible.

"Mr. Henning will hardly thank you, uncle Leon," he said, "for your extravagant praise, as it seems that he is son of a pilot, and he only did what any pilot would have done in his place. Besides, he put at risk the lives of all the people on the boat."

"If you put it in that way, my boy, I must say that his own life was worth more to him than a good many other lives, and he risked that."

"After all, uncle, there is not a vast amount of peril in a mud-bank, and I suppose that Mr. Henning is accustomed to games of bluff."

"Why, you supercilious young dog, I wonder if anything on this earth will ever please you. Mr. Henning, you must overlook Paul's little queerishness as I do. He is the only son of my dead brother, and I am taking him home to my place to put a little life into the old plantation."

"And to make him your heir," thought Fred.

He did not speak, however, but smiled pleasantly, being amused by what looked like an absurd jealousy on the part of the young man.

"Now I shall want you to come and see me, Mr. Henning," said the old gentleman. "You have plenty of leisure, or can have if you want to, and I shall insist upon a visit. It is easy to find my place—Gravelly Bayou, a few miles from Martigny—and everything I have shall be at your disposal when you come. You can make expenses by playing poker with me, if nothing else will suit you; but I do hope that you will come and give me a long visit."

Fred thanked the hearty old gentleman for his kind invitation, and said that he hoped to be able to avail himself of it.

Paul Delarosse frowned more darkly than usual, but did not openly express his displeasure until he walked away with his uncle.

"How could you invite that man to your house, uncle Leon?" he asked. "Don't you know that he is a professional gambler?"

"I think I know as much about it as you do," crustily answered the old gentleman.

"Do you wish me to associate with that class of people?"

"Now, Paul, you ought not to get to be too high-minded quite so suddenly. It is my opinion that the people I choose to associate with are quite good enough for you. What were you but a card-sharper when I picked you up in Paris?"

Fred Henning looked after the couple rather critically.

"The old gentleman is a good and well-served specimen of the Louisiana planter," he muttered; "but the young fellow has got something on his mind that ought not to be there."

CHAPTER III.

A SWAMP SUCKER.

THERE was a commotion in Natchez-Under-the-Hill.

This was not by any means an unusual event, as the town was noted for anything but quiet, and its normal condition was by no means that of stagnation.

The upper Natchez, which adorned the beautiful bluff on which it rested, was lovely with its pleasant homes, surrounded by a wealth of semi-tropical trees and fruits; but the Natchez that rested under the hill, at the bank of the river, was a dirty and straggling town, well deserving the unsavory reputation that had clung to it during many years.

It may have been the quality of the whisky that was dispensed by the Natchez bar-keepers, or it may have been the quality of the men who

drank that whisky, that caused such tumultuous results. Sure it is that the combination of men and whisky was productive of quarrels, rows, fights, cutting and shooting scrapes, and all manner of unpleasantness.

And the Natchez that adorned the top of the bluff smiled serenely, while the Natchez that lay under the hill caroused and rioted.

Consequently it was not at all surprising that there was a commotion in Natchez that afternoon in June.

This particular commotion had its origin in a train of circumstances which had gradually led up to it.

A little before noon a swamp sucker from over the river, as some of the loungers styled him, made his appearance at Charley Stamper's "O. K. House," at the landing.

He was a young man, probably younger than he looked to be, owing to his rusty garments and his seedy appearance generally.

In fact, his hickory shirt and his butternut trousers, fashioned and ragged as they were, were of the swamp swampy, and even his journey to Natchez had not rid them of the moss and mud from which he seemed to have sprung.

Moreover, he had a slouchy and stoop-shouldered way of moving about in his foxy brogans, that gave him the appearance of being older than he was.

Yet his bronzed face had good features, and his dark eyes were fine and expressive, and, if he could have been well dressed and straightened up, he might have passed for a really handsome young fellow.

But, as he looked then, with an old felt hat slouched over his face, and with a dirty carpet-sack in his hand, he was quite unattractive.

His unattractiveness was increased by his actions.

He shamled up to the bar, and called for whisky.

Charley Stamper set out a black bottle and the large glass of the period.

The swamp sucker filled the glass to the brim, the barkeeper eying him curiously as he did so.

He drank it off at a gulp, and placed ten cents on the counter.

The bar-keeper shoved the ten cents back to him, and sighed as he put away the bottle and glass.

"Why don't you take the money?" asked the customer who had been so liberal to himself.

"I hain't got no license fur sellin' liquor at wholesale," mildly remarked Charley.

Evidently the customer did not know what to make of this; but he accepted the situation and walked away from the bar.

"Who is that queer duck, Charley?" inquired a flashily-dressed man who had watched the performance.

"His name is Saul Stiner, and he is one o' them swamp suckers from over the river. You know what they are—all ague-cake and ign'ance. Shouldn't wonder if he's got a snake in that gripsack o' his'n."

Sure enough, that was what Saul Stiner had, and he had visited Charley Stamper's saloon for the purpose of exhibiting his snake and picking up a few shillings by the show.

He placed the carpet-sack on a table, and began to untie the strings that held it shut.

There were near a dozen men in the room, and most of them hastened to move away from the vicinity of that table.

"This here, gen'lemen," said he, "is a bigger rattler than you're likely to see over here, unless somebody brings him."

He opened the carpet-sack, and forth emerged an immense and evil-looking serpent, evidently a rattlesnake, which coiled itself about the exhibitor's arm.

"Look at him, gen'lemen!" exclaimed Saul. "Ain't he a beauty? 'Leven rattles and a button, and his fangs is jest as good as they ever was. Here's where he bit me—right here on the back of my hand."

He showed the back of his hand, where a sore was plainly visible, from which a little greenish matter was still oozing.

"He bit me there when I began to tame him, and I had to drink nigh two quarts o' whisky afore I got the best o' that bite. But he won't bite me ag'in 'cause I've got him tame, though his fangs is as good as ever, and there ain't nothin' to be afraid of, gen'lemen, 'cause he's as gentle as a lamb. Jest watch him, now."

Just then the snake was not a pleasant object to watch, as he was coiled around the exhibitor's arm, with his head erect, his bead-like eyes fastened on the unwilling audience, and his forked tongue darting in and out of his ugly open mouth.

The swamp sucker unwrapped the hideous reptile, coiled him around his neck, took him off, stretched him out in the air at arm's length by the head and tail, placed him against his naked bosom, and performed various other antics with him that made the bystanders shiver.

Doubtless they would gladly have got away from the show; but the exhibitor with his exhibition was between them and the door.

"Take that thing away!" roared the flashily dressed man who had spoken to the barkeeper.

"Take it out of here, I say, or I will blow a hole through you."

"That ain't the thing to do, Ned Sparks," demurred Charley Stamper. "The easiest way is allus the best. I say, Saul, pitch me your hat, and I'll take up a good collection for you."

The exhibitor instantly obeyed, and the hat was passed around while he played with his snake, and all were quick with their contributions.

"On condition that he goes away," observed Ned Sparks, as he dropped a bill into the hat.

Charley Stamper placed the hat on the counter.

"Shut up that critter now, Saul," said he, "an' come an' git yer hat, an' we don't keer to see any more o' the show to-day."

The swamp sucker's eyes glistened as he emptied the pile of money from the hat into his pocket.

"All right," he muttered, and he picked up his carpetsack, and left the saloon.

The others followed him at a respectful distance. Doubtless they had been aching for a chance to get out into the open air.

Outside the sunshine was hot, and the ragged bank that passed for a levee was dry and dusty.

Perhaps it was the uncomfortable state of the atmosphere and of things generally that fretted the swamp sucker and increased his easily aroused anger.

He turned to see who was following him, and perceived Ned Sparks.

Then he stopped and faced that individual, speaking to him sharply:

"You are the man who threatened to shoot me if I didn't git out," said he. "Are you fool enough to think I would have gone for that?"

It was worthy of notice that his manner and his style of speaking had changed considerably since he came out of Charley Stamper's place.

"Get away from here, now," replied Sparks, as he took a step backward. "If you fool with me, young man, you are liable to get hurt."

Saul Stiner had been fumbling with the string that tied his carpet-sack, and he suddenly opened it, and pulled out the rattlesnake.

He held the reptile out with both hands, its ugly mouth open, and its crooked fangs showing.

"Don't you dare to come near me!" exclaimed Sparks as he took another step backward.

"Keep away, young man, or you will get hurt!"

"I will, will I? Say another word, and I will throw this snake in your face."

Sparks had thrust his hand into his breast-pocket, and at this moment he drew forth a revolver.

As Saul raised the reptile, the pistol was fired with quick and certain aim, sending the severed head whirling in the air.

The swamp sucker lowered his pet, and gazed at it sadly, while his antagonist replaced the revolver in his breast-pocket.

Then the real commotion began.

The man who had come out of the saloon suddenly grew valorous, and rushed at Saul Stiner with angry and vengeful cries.

"Go for him, Ned Sparks!"

"Kill the cussed snake coddler!"

"Snatch him baldheaded, boys!"

"Pitch him into the river!"

The swamp sucker dropped the dead snake—dead, though still seemingly alive—and glared fiercely at the howling pack.

"No, boys, no," said a man of gentlemanly appearance, who stepped forward to his side.

The words were spoken quietly and calmly, but with a commanding tone and air that compelled respect.

"Hello, Fred Henning!" shouted Sparks. "Is that really you, old boy?"

"Every bit of me, you may bet. Suppose you let this poor fellow go, Ned. I don't think you have any call to worry him."

"All right. Anything to oblige a friend. I don't want to hurt him; but I had to settle that infernal rattler of his."

The others, when they perceived that Fred Henning and Ned Sparks were prepared to side with the swamp sucker, ceased their hostile demonstrations.

"I think you had better go home, my friend," said Flush Fred, "and I advise you to leave your snakes at home the next time you come over here."

"I will, if you say so," answered Saul Stiner, "and I am much obliged to you, sir."

He picked up his carpet-sack, walked down to the river, unmoored his skiff, and rowed himself away from Natchez.

"Where did you drop from, Fred?" inquired Ned Sparks. "Been visiting the big-bugs on the hill?"

"I have been circulating in that neighborhood a little."

"And you have brought down a pile of wealth with you, I'll be bound. Come and give me a chance to beat you out of some of it."

CHAPTER IV.

FREED BY A BLOODHOUND.

"So you think I can't find the way, Antoine," remarked a young gentleman who was seated on the porch of a Frenchy-looking old tavern

near the edge of the small town of Vidalia, smoking an after-dinner cigar.

"I doubt if you can, Mr. Henning," replied Antoine Pasteur, a middle-aged man who, despite the Frenchness of his name, seemed to have little else about him that was French.

"Why not? What is the matter with the road?"

"Nothing is the matter with it, if you know what to do with it. It is not much of a road, and it winds in and out among the swamps and bayous, and it branches off here and there, and the high water has mixed things up, and—"

"That will do, my friend. I think you are trying to frighten me. What do you take me for?"

"For a man who knows what he is doing, as well as any man does, but who is apt to be a little headstrong. There is not much travel that way, Mr. Henning. The fact is that Colonel Delarosse—"

"Is he a colonel, then?" interrupted Flush Fred.

"How can anybody tell you anything when you break in like that? General Delarosse, as I was saying—"

"You are promoting him rapidly, Antoine."

"If he stays on his plantation he will get as big a title as the parish can afford or invent. He has a landing of his own, down there near Gravelly Bayou, which he calls Martigny, though it is no sort of a place at all, and no map-maker would think of noticing it. He wants to make a town there, though, and has done just enough at it to get up a little straggling trade, and that's the reason—"

"I do declare, Antoine, that you will talk me to death if I stay here any longer, and there is not a bit of reason in your talk. Give me the bearings—that's all I want—and I will bet you ten dollars that I make the trip all right."

"I will take the bet, sir, and will give you the best directions I can, and I do honestly hope you may win."

Flush Fred paid his bill, had a parting glass with his host, and started off, afoot and alone.

His dinner had been late, and he had smoked and talked for some time after dinner; so that a considerable slice had been cut out of the afternoon when he set out.

But he had been told that it was only a few miles to Gravelly Bayou, and surely it must be a pleasant walk by cotton or corn fields and neat plantations, and under the shade of a magnificent forest.

Flush Fred was a capital walker, and expected to enjoy his tramp greatly, laughing at the predictions of the Vidalia tavern-keeper, and expecting to reach his destination before nightfall.

Yet there was something the matter, and his pleasant anticipations began to give place to anxiety.

As the sun began to get low down in the sky he knew that he had traveled more than "a few miles"—in fact, more than several miles, and yet he had not come in sight of Gravelly Bayou or any other large plantation.

Indeed, the fine plantations and the cultivated fields which he had expected to see were nowhere visible along the route he was traveling.

He had passed the last of them some distance back, and he appeared to be approaching a region of forest and swamp, where no habitations were likely to be found.

What was the matter?

The road, as Antoine Pasteur had said, was not much of a road, and in places the high water had effaced all signs of a road, and it ran here and there to avoid swamps and bayous or big sloughs; but he believed that he had kept the general direction that he had been told to take.

Yet he might have mistaken the course and got far away from the right track.

If so, what should he do about it?

He could turn back, or could go forward until he should reach a habitation of some sort.

As turning back was not at all in his line, he pressed on, hastening his steps, as a man will when he has lost his way.

The sun went down, and he was still in the forest.

Night came on, and he was tangled in a swampy maze, where the live-oaks and cypresses, with their heavy banners of gray moss, made the darkness yet denser.

The only road visible before him was a corduroy track, at places partly buried in the mud, apparently leading nowhere, and in every aspect uninviting.

As Flush Fred halted, and looked around despairingly, he doubtless wished that he had turned back when he could.

A deep bark, heavy and ominous as thunder, shook the thick air of the forest, and he turned his startled eyes in the direction of the sound.

In the growing darkness he saw a large black animal speeding toward him with long leaps, and its voice and size told him that it must be a bloodhound of the biggest and fiercest species.

Should he stand his ground and shoot the beast as it came on?

That would be too risky.

If his first shot should not prove fatal, he might not have a chance to fire another.

It was easy to reach a place of refuge, where he would have a better chance against the brute.

He ran to a live-oak tree, caught a hanging bough, and swung himself up into a position of safety.

In this he was none too quick, as the hound reached the foot of the tree before he had settled himself, and its great mouth opened wide, and its cruel jaws snapped as it sprung at the lower boughs, its thunderous bark rousing the echoes of the forest.

Would the beast climb the tree?

There could be no doubt that it wanted to, and at times it came so near accomplishing its object, that Fred Henning mounted a little higher, and drew his pistol.

But the hound soon ceased its attempts to jump up into the tree, and settled back on its haunches and its bark changed to a howl.

Flush Fred was fairly treed, and the question was how long he should submit to that sort of treatment.

He admired the big brute, though he recognized it as a dangerous animal, and was decidedly opposed to shooting it; but that seemed to be the only course that was left to him.

He had drawn his pistol, and had cocked it for the purpose of taking a deliberate aim at his fierce guard, when a loud and shrill whistle pierced the heavy air of the forest.

The hound cocked its ears, as if it knew the whistle, and barked a thunderous reply, but did not stir from its position.

"Hello-o-o!" yelled the man in the live-oak, and an answering cry came to him from a little distance.

"What have you treed here, Satan?" demanded a man who ran to the dog with long steps.

Dark as it was, Fred Henning had no difficulty in recognizing the uncouth garments and slouching figure of Saul Stiner, whom he had last seen at the Natchez landing.

"It is a white man that your hound has treed," said he. "I was not willing to shoot him, but might have been compelled to do so, if you had not come along."

The swamp sucker spoke to the dog, and it came and crouched at his feet.

Fred Henning dropped down from the tree.

Saul Stiner seemed to be able to see in the night quite as well as in the day.

Dark as it was, he at once recognized the man who had rescued him from the Natchez roughs.

"Is it really you, sir?" he exclaimed. "How did you ever get here?"

Fred explained that he had been endeavoring to find his way to Gravelly Bayou, the plantation of Leon Delarosse.

"You were going right away from it on this road," replied Saul. "You couldn't get there to-night, Mr. Henning."

"You know me, then," remarked Fred.

"Reckon I ought to. I saw you in Natchez, and heard your name there. I ain't apt to forget a man who does me a favor."

"I hope you will tell me, then, how I am to get out of this scrape."

"Your only chance is to go and stay with me and the old man."

"Who is the old man?"

"My dad. We live in a cabin nigh here. Come and pass the night with us, and in the morning I will take you over to Gravelly Bayou."

Fred Henning gave a thankful assent, and they set out through the forest, Saul Stiner leading the way, Fred following, and the great hound bringing up the rear.

CHAPTER V.

LIFE AND DEATH IN THE SWAMP.

SAUL STINER halted at the edge of a sheet of water that seemed in the darkness to be a considerable lake.

It might, however, be more perfectly styled a large pond, being one of the natural basins of that swampy region.

Near the middle of the pond an island was dimly visible, and Fred Henning thought that he could descry in the darkness the outlines of a habitation there.

A skiff was there at the swampy shore, which they entered, Fred Henning occupying the stern, and Satan the bow, while Saul pulled them across to the island.

There the skiff was hauled up, and they walked a few steps to a low log-cabin, nearly concealed by the luxuriant foliage.

No light was visible, nor was there any sound of life within the rude structure.

Saul Stiner took a large key from his pocket. "We have locks here," said he, "and sometimes I lock the old man up when I go away. He gets kinder queer now and then."

They entered the house, Satan bringing up the rear, and Saul closed the door and bolted it with a heavy wooden bar.

Although no light had been visible from without, the interior of the cabin was fairly illuminated by a coal-oil lamp on a large and stout table.

There was but one room in the cabin, and but

one bedstead in the room; but there was a sufficiency of decent and durable furniture, including a book-case pretty well filled with books.

Around the walls, on shelves, hanging from hooks, and variously placed and attached, was a miscellaneous collection of rare and bright-plumaged birds, beasts, reptiles and insects, stuffed, dried and otherwise prepared and preserved, and on the table was a handsome blue heron, in process of being mounted.

At the broad fireplace an old man was stooping, engaged in stirring out a little bed of coals from the ashes.

He was dressed in garments of butternut-jeans, stoutly made, but very ill-fitting, and when he quickly arose and sharply turned his head around, he was seen to be a withered old man, with very bright eyes, and a keen, suspicious expression of countenance.

"What does this mean?" he gruffly demanded. "What company is this? Did I say you might bring company here, Saul?"

"This is the gentleman who helped me when I was in trouble at Natchez," answered the young swamp sucker. "I found him in trouble here, and have helped him in my turn. He had lost his way in the swamp, and Satan found him."

"And what was a gentleman of his sort doing in the swamp after dark?"

"He lost his way, dad. He was trying to get down to the Delarosse plantation."

"Oho! Hunting Leon Delarosse? And what will he see when he finds him? A puff of wind! A swelled-up, stuck-up specimen of our sweet-scented aristocracy! Bah! And what is your name, young gentleman?"

"Fred Henning," answered the owner of the name.

"And what is your business, if you have any?"

"You don't ought to be so inquisitive, dad," remarked Saul.

Flush Fred's quick insight must have taught him that he was in company where plain speaking would be understood and appreciated.

"I am a gambler by profession. I play cards for a living."

"You are?" joyfully exclaimed the old man.

"I am glad to see you—powerful glad to see you. I used to be counted a good hand at more games than one; but I am rusty now, as Saul don't care for cards. I like your looks, too. Sit right down, and make yourself at home. My son, you must make Satan acquainted with this gentleman."

Saul whispered to the great hound, pointing at Fred Henning.

Satan walked to the stranger, with a really friendly and familiar look in his eyes, placed his big paws on Fred's knees, and raised himself so that the dog's face was level with that of the man.

There he stood, his red tongue hanging out of his open mouth, his great black face beaming with intelligence, and his long tail wagging vigorously.

"He has got you down fine now, Mr. Henning," said Saul. "He could pick you out of the biggest crowd on the darkest night, and he wants you to understand that you are a friend of his."

"He is a magnificent fellow," replied Fred, "and I am very glad to be numbered among his friends. He may be sure that I will never go back on him."

The old man had again given his attention to the fire, and had started a blaze, to which he added some sticks.

By the time Saul had rolled up his sleeves and washed his hands there was a useful fire on the hearth, and the young man speedily and deftly proceeded to cook some bacon and corn bread, and to clear and set the table.

Flush Fred, after the dog had left him, was attracted by the specimens on the walls, which he examined attentively.

"I see some very fine work here," said he. "I would like to know which one of you does it and whether it is for his own amusement."

"Saul is a good boy," answered the old man. "He likes to hunt those things and to fix them up, and he gets pretty well paid for them, too."

"I might find him plenty of customers for such work as that, and for such specimens as these," remarked Fred.

"Oh, he has his regular customers, who are glad enough to get the things, and he makes money enough for us two to live on, as we live. Saul is a good boy, a very good boy."

"But it ought to pay him well—such work as this. It ought to be better than showing rattlesnakes in Natchez, and I hope he won't do that any more."

"You may bet high that I won't," Saul answered for himself. "Now, Mr. Henning, supper is ready, such as it is."

The supper would not have tempted any but a hungry man; but Saul Stiner's father brought out from some mysterious recess a bottle of Madeira wine, which he opened and set before his guest.

Fred Henning considered himself a connoisseur in wines. He had sampled the best that could be procured on the Western rivers and in the

Western cities; but he had never tasted anything like that Madeira. It was mellow and fruity beyond anything that he had supposed to be possible in wine.

He expressed his surprise and delight by looks, rather than by words.

"Yes, that is what you may call wine," said the old man, answering his look.

"It must be very old," observed Fred.

"Old? Well, I should say so. Does your memory happen to reach back to the time of Lafitte, young man?"

"The buccaneer of Barataria Bay? Scarcely."

"That wine reaches back to his time, though. It was one of his prizes."

Fred's astonishment was increased after supper, when he glanced over the books in the room.

They were all scientific works, mostly treating of beasts, birds, fishes and plants, and they showed the marks of constant use.

Who could those two people be, who lived there like hermits, in that log cabin in the midst of a swamp, and apparently in poverty and isolation, yet were deeply read in science, and could set before a transient guest wine that was easily worth ten dollars a bottle?

Of course they were cranks. There could be no other answer to the conundrum.

"And so Leon Delarosse is home again, and has brought to the old plantation a fine new nephew," said the old man, musingly, as he smoked his pipe and gazed at the embers on the hearth.

No one interrupted his train of thought, and he went on:

"Well, there are many fools in this world, and many sorts of fools. Leon Delarosse is one of the well-meaning kind. He means well, but, oh! what a pile of sense he lacks! Because he thinks he has no kin in the world but one, he has to go to France and find a nephew, the only son of his dead brother—the brother who hated and despised him. That is too good a thing to be kept in such a corner of the world as this is. It ought to be published everywhere. Have you seen that nephew, Mr. Henning?"

Flush Fred explained how he had made the acquaintance of Leon Delarosse and his nephew Paul.

In response to the old man's request he described the appearance of the nephew and his own impressions concerning him.

"Just so," said the old man. "Just what might have been expected. Fools are bound to do the work of fools, and nothing else. But it is none of my business. Do you think you could have the patience to worry through a few games of cards with an old man, Mr. Henning?"

Fred had the patience and the cards, and both were at the service of his queer host.

Out of deference to the old man, who was a real curiosity in his eyes, he played so as to lose occasionally, and the other's delight when he won was quite amusing.

"You see that I haven't forgotten how to play," he said. "I am rusty, but the old knowledge sticks to me yet. Ah! I used to be a rare hand at play in the old days when dollars and doubloons were all one to me."

Fred Henning wondered what those old days were, but was unwilling to offend the host by inquisitiveness.

They were immersed in their game when the hound suddenly jumped up with a growl, and then made the walls of the cabin fairly shake with his thunderous bark.

Saul Stiner rushed to a rack and took down a rifle; and the old man rose hastily and groped for a carbine.

Flush Fred was astonished.

He wondered what was the matter, but was content to wait and see.

The barking of the dog was stilled by Saul; but he continued to growl heavily as voices outside could be indistinctly heard.

"They mean business this time, dad," remarked Saul.

"Are they robbers?" asked Fred.

"I reckon they are, and I reckon some of 'em will get hurt."

Fred drew his revolver, and made sure that it was in good working order.

Suddenly a heavy blow struck the door, as if the end of a battering ram had been forced against it.

Saul put his hand on the stout oaken bars.

"What are you going to do?" demanded the old man.

"I don't mean to let 'em spoil my new door," answered Saul.

He removed the bar hastily, and at the next blow the door flew wide open.

Instantly the old man opened fire with his carbine, and Saul with his rifle, and Fred Henning, stepping forward between them, discharged chamber after chamber of his revolver through the open door.

There was nothing to fire at, apparently, but a clump of darkness.

It was a moving clump, though, and the shots told upon it so that it broke up and scattered, with shouts, yells and screams, and there was no effective answer to the firing from within.

By the time Fred Henning had emptied the

six chambers of his revolver it was evident that the assailants had been put to flight.

Saul Stiner made a sign to the dog, which had lain crouched near the door, and with a savage growl Satan sprang out into the darkness.

The next moment there was a cry of agony, and nothing more was heard.

While Fred Henning was recharging his revolver, and the old man was attending to his carbine, Saul was lighting a lantern, and when it was ready he led the way outside.

On the ground in front of the door were plentiful splotches of blood, showing that at least one of the marauders had been badly hurt there.

The searchers followed the trail of blood, which led around the corner of the cabin toward the western end of the little island.

At a little distance from the door they found the body of a burly negro, who was quite dead.

An examination showed that two bullets had struck him, and his lacerated throat told the rest of the story.

Attempting to drag himself away after his companions, Satan had caught him and pulled him down, and his death-cry was what had been heard in the cabin.

The hound was howling at the end of the island, and Saul ran there with the lantern.

"There they go!" said he. "They came in a boat."

Fred looked in the direction pointed out to him, but saw nothing, though he heard the rapid dipping of oars in the distance.

The marauders had been badly hurt, and frightened even worse than they were hurt.

Nothing remained to be done out there, and the two men returned with the hound to the cabin, where Saul barred the door, and his father proposed to renew the game, as if nothing unusual had happened.

"Somebody has lost a stout field hand," remarked Henning.

The old man shook his head.

"Perhaps he was lost a long time ago," said Saul. "There are niggers in the Louisiana swamps who ran away long ago, and their owners have given them up."

"Do you suppose they were all niggers who attacked you to-night?"

"Very likely there were white men among them."

"Are you often troubled in this way?"

"Not often; but we have been bothered some. The scamps have a notion that we keep money here. We look like it, now, don't we?"

"That must make an unpleasant life for you here."

"Well, it is one kind of a life. I reckon we had better go to bed, dad, as Mr. Henning will want to take an early start in the morning."

CHAPTER VI.

FLUSH FRED AT GRAVELLY BAYOU.

GRAVELLY BAYOU, the home and plantation of Leon Delarosse, took its name from a small body of water, too sluggish to be called a stream, which formed part of its southern boundary, and had its origin in the main bayou that stretched north and south for a considerable distance.

There was a tradition that a bank of gravel had once been there—though nobody could imagine how it got there. If so, it had long since disappeared.

There was another tradition that a certain Major Gravelly had been the original settler there, and had given his name to the bayou.

However that may be, Gravelly Bayou was a beautiful and a valuable plantation, well kept up, well stocked, and well worked by an efficient force of slaves headed by an excellent overseer.

The house was only two stories in height, but was roomy and spacious, and all around it was a broad veranda, which could be closed in on two sides by falling blinds of canes.

The grounds were beautifully laid out, with an abundance of flowering plants and shrubs, and semi-tropical fruits were there in abundance, and the Virginia creeper, evidently a special favorite, hung its scarlet blossoms over the house and everywhere.

At a little distance from the house were neat whitewashed negro quarters, and all the out-buildings spoke of thrift, and a broad field of promising sugar-cane stretched away toward the east.

Indeed, taken altogether, Gravelly Bayou was a lovely residence and a profitable plantation, the owner of which might well be an object of envy.

Yet the present proprietor, as he sat alone on the veranda, smoking a cigar after a late breakfast, appeared to be lonely and dispirited.

While he was gazing sadly and somewhat wistfully into vacancy, his vision fell on two men who were walking toward the house.

He could easily see that one of them was well dressed and apparently a stranger, and the other was without doubt one of the poor whites or swamp suckers of the neighborhood.

They halted at the gate that led into the grounds immediately attached to the house.

"There is the house, Mr. Henning," said one. "Won't you step in with me, Saul, and rest a little?"

"No, sir. I can't go in there."

"Why not?"

"Dad has some kind of a prejudice against it, and I mustn't worry him."

"But it will make a long tramp for you, if you go straight back home."

"That don't bother me a bit."

"I wish I could make you some sort of a present, Saul."

"But you can't, Mr. Henning. You got me out of a scrape at Natchez, and you fought for us last night, and that ought to satisfy you. Good-by, Mr. Henning, and may good luck go with you and stick to you!"

"Remember me kindly to your father, Saul, and take care of yourself."

Leon Delarosse got up and looked earnestly at Fred Henning as he entered the gate.

Then he put on his glasses and took another look.

Then he threw away his cigar, and ran down the steps with almost youthful agility to meet the new-comer.

He did not exactly throw himself into the arms of Flush Fred, but reached out both his hands to him, and greeted him most heartily.

Fred was impressed by the evident genuineness of the old gentleman's hospitable welcome, and responded to it in his most genial manner.

Mr. Delarosse led him up on the veranda, when some vigorous stamping and yelling brought a colored servant, to whom lavish orders were hastily given.

A table was speedily brought forth, followed by mint, sugar, bottles and glasses, with a supply of cigars, and the two men seated themselves in easy-chairs, while Mr. Delarosse proceeded to perform the duties of hospitality by mixing juleps.

"I suppose you would think I was exaggerating," said he, "if I should tell you how glad I really am to see you. It is not only because it is you, but because almost any company would be acceptable to me in my loneliness. When I was sure that it was you, I was so rejoiced that I almost jumped out of my boots."

Fred Henning sipped his julep, praised its coolness, and fragrance and flavor, and wondered a little at the old gentleman's extravagant expressions.

"Oh, it is exactly so," declared Mr. Delarosse, "and I could say much more if I would. I have been dying to see somebody, and there is nobody I would rather see than you."

Fred looked over the lovely grounds, and across to the shining water of the bayou, and doubtless thought that a reasonable man ought be able to enjoy life in that Paradise.

"Is it possible that you are so lonely here?" he asked.

"Lonely is no name for it, Mr. Henning. I am positively being bored to death. The fact is that I have been out in the big world for more than three years, traveling here and there, and visiting all the big cities and show places in this country and Europe. It is only natural that when I get back to the solitude of Gravelly Bayou I should find the change a great one, and for a time quite depressing. I could stand it better if I had company to cheer me up; but few people care to visit a lone old man."

"But you have your nephew here, I suppose?" suggested Fred. "He ought to be company for you, and to bring company to the house."

Mr. Delarosse shook his head sadly, and a frown gathered on his brow.

"You are right about that, my friend," said he. "A young man like Paul ought to be company for his old uncle, and ought to attract company to such a house as this, where he can entertain them as he pleases. But the serious fact is that he is not company for me, and that he brings no company here, chiefly because he is generally away from home."

Fred Henning mildly expressed his surprise at this state of affairs.

"It is just so," continued the old gentleman. "When I brought him here he was highly pleased with the place, or pretended to be, and seemed to take such a lively interest in the plantation that I thought he was going to be a fine helper for me, as well as a pleasant companion. But after awhile he began to grow discontented and restless, and then he insisted upon going away, to New Orleans, I believe. He said that he needed clothes, though I am sure he had plenty."

"I supplied him with money, and he was about two weeks away. When he came back he brought no new clothes to speak of, though he had spent all his money."

"He moped around here for a while, but took no interest in anything. I had got a billiard table for him, and had hoped that he would visit among the neighbors; but it was no pleasure to him to play billiards with such an old fellow as I am, and the neighborhood knew nothing of Paul Delarosse."

"He had not been home a week when he wanted to go off again, and away he went, with very little ceremony. He did not tell me when he would return, and has not had the politeness

to send me a line. You can see, now, how much good I am getting out of my nephew."

"I suppose," suggested Fred, "that he has been used to plenty of company and a gay life."

"Plenty of company, no doubt," responded the old gentleman. "His life may have been a gay one; but you would hardly call it attractive. He was living in a garret when I found him, and was picking up a precarious living by getting the better of people at cards and billiards. I declare, Henning, I am talking to you as if you were my oldest friend and bound to listen to all my troubles; but I have taken a strong liking to you, and believe you to be worthy of confidence."

"I hope you will never have cause to go back on that belief, sir."

"I am sure that I never will. Now, I am going to tell you the whole story, if you care to listen to it."

"I will gladly listen, if it pleases you to tell it."

"My father, who was considered a wealthy man in his day, left his property, undivided, to his only children, my brother David and myself. David and I had never agreed, and as the elder brother, he delighted in tyrannizing over me. After my father's death we got on worse than ever, and finally we agreed to divide the property and separate."

"David took what he wanted, all the personal property, leaving me what I considered much the better share, the land and the servants."

"He was of a roving and adventurous disposition, and it was seldom I heard from him, and then he was usually in some foreign land. In the course of time I heard nothing more from him, and could find out nothing about him."

"After many years I received a letter from Paris, informing me that David, at some period in the past, had purchased and loaded a vessel, in which he had sailed for some port in the West Indies, and the ship had been lost with all on board. He had left a son in Paris, but no property that could be found."

"I hastened to Paris, found the young man, and brought him home, glad to have some person with me who was of my own blood, and who would be dear to me and the heir of my estate."

"But I must confess to you, Henning, that I am, if anything, more lonely than before. I don't understand Paul, I can't make him out at all. He is not in the least like me, as you know. At the same time he does not seem to me to be a bit like his father. David was high-tempered, overbearing, and in every way different from me; but he was daring, chivalrous, free-hearted, and had the instincts of a gentleman. But I do not seem to find anything of him in Paul."

"But you have no doubt that he is your brother's son," remarked Fred.

"Oh, no. They manage those things carefully in France. I saw the registry of birth, and of baptism, and Paul's identity was sufficiently proved to me."

"He is your only relation, I think you have told me?"

"My only living kin. I never married, you see. There was a girl who was very dear to me; but she was not for me. She married a man named Helmsley, up in Tennessee, and I—that is, I never cared to marry."

Fred Henning could have told the old gentleman of a matron of his acquaintance, named Helmsley, who lived in Tennessee. She had doubtless been a beauty in her day, and it was quite possible that she was the lost love of Leon Delarosse.

But, was it worth while?

The old gentleman was settled, and had brought his nephew home to be his heir. It would do him no good to learn that his old sweetheart was a widow with two grown children. It would be better for him to remember her as she used to be.

No, it was not worth while, and Flush Fred kept his knowledge to himself, but naturally did not forget what he had heard.

CHAPTER VII.

A THREAD IN THE LOOM OF FATE.

THE day after Flush Fred's arrival at Gravelly Bayou Paul Delarosse came home, greatly to his uncle's surprise, and not much to his delight, as the presence of the young man did not tend to make the place a bit more cheerful.

He had gone away in a bad humor, and he had returned in a bad humor.

He moped, and sulked, and made himself generally disagreeable.

Leon Delarosse decided that he would give a party, to try to amuse the young man, but quite as much, probably, for the purpose of getting his neighbors about him and enjoying their society.

So invitations were sent around by mounted negro boys, and General Brayham and his wife came up to assist their old friend in his arrangements and in receiving his guests.

A party at Gravelly Bayou was a very different affair from a party in a city, or in a thickly settled neighborhood.

Many of the guests would come long distances, and could not be expected to return to their homes at the close of the festivities.

Consequently they would pass the night at the house, and with some of them the visit might last several days.

The preparations for the party did not tend to improve the disposition of Paul Delarosse.

Indeed, nothing seemed to please that morose young man.

It was evident, from the moment of his arrival, that the presence of Fred Henning was extremely disagreeable to him.

He did not scruple to make manifest his antipathy to that young man, and spoke openly against him to his uncle.

"Why do you have that fellow in the house, uncle Leon?" he suddenly demanded.

"Because he is my friend," brusquely replied the old gentleman.

"Do you expect him to be here when your guests come?"

"If he will stay, and I hope he will."

"There may be somebody present who knows him to be a common river gambler."

"There will surely be one who knows what you were when I found you in Paris."

Paul glowered at his uncle, and said nothing more.

He condescended to play billiards with Fred Henning, as that was the only amusement he cared for, and Fred was the only person in the house who could really play the game.

His uncle and General Bayham, Paul said, could poke the balls about, but knew no more about billiards than the sticks they were handling knew.

When he was playing with Fred Henning he won quite frequently, chiefly by his adroitness in adding to his string buttons that did not belong to him.

Fred took no notice of these eccentricities, for he was unwilling, for the sake of his host, to quarrel with the young man.

But the case was different when Paul had finally persuaded the guest to play for a stake.

Then, when Fred was getting the better of the game, he slyly increased his score by adding several points which he had not earned.

Fred quietly shoved them back.

"What are you doing to my string?" angrily demanded the other.

"Putting back the points that don't belong to you. That sort of thing was not so bad when we were merely playing for pastime; but I can't allow it when there is money on the game."

"Do you dare to say that I cheat?"

"You know that you do."

"You are a liar!"

Fred Henning quietly replaced his cue in the rack.

"If it were not for the respect I have for your uncle," Fred mildly remarked, "I would box your ears, young man."

Paul's face turned red, and his vicious disposition showed itself in his distorted features.

His right hand sought his pistol-pocket.

"Quit that!" sharply ordered Fred. "Don't make a fool of yourself. You have not lived long enough among Americans, I suppose, to know that some of them are quick on the trigger and sure when they shoot. I could send you to kingdom come before you could pull a pistol, and I warn you not to attempt to play any such games with me when I am looking at you."

"You are playing a game of your own," sulkily answered Paul. "You are trying to get the upper hand of my uncle, and are staying here to see how far you can swindle him."

"Have it so, if you want to. Your insults don't worry me. I consider the source, as the Hoosier said when the polecat paid its respects to him."

Thereafter Fred Henning had as little to do with Paul as possible, and the young man grew sulkier and more morose than ever.

The party came off, and was a great success. The hospitality of Gravelly Bayou was lavish but well ordered. Mr. Delarosse and General Bayham and his wife made the guests feel at home, and left nothing unattended to that could contribute to their comfort and entertainment. The house was filled but not crowded, and Leon Delarosse could not fail to be highly satisfied as he perceived the respect and affection in which he was held by his neighbors near and far.

As for Paul, he was not brilliant by nature, and he made no effort to shine before his uncle's guests.

Being known as the heir of the Gravelly Bayou estate, he was naturally courted by the wives and daughters of the neighboring planters, and the young men were not backward in making his acquaintance.

But he was inclined to be a little too familiar with the young ladies, and quite too supercilious toward the young gentlemen.

"That fellow has no more breeding than a billy-goat," remarked Will Crenshaw. "I am afraid that the time will come before long when I will have to give his nose a twist."

Paul found several there who were able to talk French with him; but he did not shine in French any better than in English. He sneered

at their Creole pronunciation, and laughed at their mistakes.

He had, however, one redeeming quality—he was a capital dancer, and this accomplishment caused the girls to tolerate him, though it did not render him any more popular with the young men.

Fred Henning, on the contrary, was a favorite from the first.

Always willing and eager to please, he "spread himself" on this occasion, probably from a desire to gratify Leon Delarosse, for whom he had a genuine liking.

Whatever his birth and breeding might have been, he gave no person any reason to suppose that he had not been brought up among the best and always mingled with the best.

He made himself entertaining to all, and old and young joined in pronouncing him a very bright and agreeable young fellow.

Fred's popularity served to increase the sulkeness of Paul Delarosse, who might have exerted himself to a little better purpose if he had not perceived the impossibility of outshining his uncle's friend.

Among those who were attracted to Fred was Mrs. Brenner, the elderly widow of a wealthy planter, who struck up quite a lively friendship with him, and he was glad that he was able to entertain the motherly old lady.

She told him of her lovely but lonely plantation near the Vidal, where she lived with her two little grandchildren, all that were left to her since the death of her only daughter.

"But we will not be lonely much longer," she said. "The little girls need to be taught, and I need company, and our needs will be soon supplied now. A young lady who is very amiable as well as very intelligent has consented to come and make her home with us, and we are anxiously expecting her. I understand that you are from Tennessee. Mr. Henning, and my young friend is from Tennessee. It is just possible that you may know her. Her name is Kate Helmsley."

Fred Henning was sure that he did know her. The name was that of one who was dearer to him than all else besides, but whom he regarded as quite beyond his reach.

"I think I have heard of her," he answered, concealing a palpable blush.

Mrs. Brenner's answers to a few inquiries satisfied him that the expected young lady was the same Kate Helmsley whose image was impressed upon his heart.

"Her mother is dead," continued the old lady, "and her brother is married, and they have had reverses; but I believe that she is coming for her pleasure, rather than for profit, as she is a dear friend of mine and a distant relative."

Fred was too considerate to claim acquaintance with Kate Helmsley. It might be embarrassing to her in the future, if Mrs. Brenner should inquire concerning him, and truthful Kate should be compelled to confess that the young man who called himself her friend was a river gambler.

"When is the young lady coming?" he asked.

Mrs. Brenner could not answer definitely. She expected her soon, but no certain time had been set, and Kate would probably write before she left Tennessee.

Fred Henning resolved that he would leave Gravelly Bayou.

Kate Helmsley might come into that part of the country unexpectedly, and he would not for the world be in any way an embarrassment to her.

It was just possible that he might meet her on the river, and at least have the privilege of looking at her during a part of her journey.

At all events, he would go.

The next day something occurred that confirmed him in his resolution, and hastened its execution.

CHAPTER VIII.

FLUSH FRED AND HIS FIST.

GRAVELLY BAYOU of course had an overseer, and his name was Ez-kial Tibbles, commonly known as Zeke, but always addressed and spoken of by the proprietor of the plantation as Mr. Tibbles.

He was a Yankee of the Yankees, thoroughly Downeastern yet in his speech, manner and habits, although he had been for nearly ten years a resident of Louisiana, and his style was so ingrained that he was not likely ever to change it in any essential particular.

Mr. Tibbles completely enjoyed the confidence of Leon Delarosse, who had left him the entire management of the plantation in his own absence, and he well deserved that confidence, as he was an honest and reliable man, steady as clockwork, careful and thorough, who slighted nothing, and knew how to make the most of everything and the best of everything.

Although he was a Yankee, he did not treat the servants harshly or expect too much from them, but was well liked by all, from the worn-out gray-heads of the pickaninnies, and at the same time was respected by all the planters, factors and others, with whom the requirements of his position brought him in contact.

As Zeke Tibbles was well paid, and had but

few expenses, he was able to save money, and did save it.

He had good cause for so doing, although he was a widower, being blessed, as Jephtha was, with one fair daughter.

Kitty Tibbles had just turned seventeen when Leon Delarosse brought his nephew home, and was decidedly pretty, a bright and merry hoyden whose pranks were smiled at even by her stern and careful father.

It was quite natural that such a paragon of an overseer as Mr. Tibbles should not find favor in the eyes of Paul Delarosse, and it did not take him long to discover that he was one of the chief of that young gentleman's many aversions.

They had had several "spats" before Fred Henning came to Gravelly Bayou, and shortly after Paul's return on that occasion there had been a serious disagreement between them.

The dispute was concerning a riding-horse whose tail Paul had ordered to be "bobbed;" but Zeke Tibbles, knowing that Mr. Delarosse objected to the practice as unnatural and cruel, had not allowed the horse to be touched.

When Paul perceived that his order had not been obeyed, he flew into a passion, and insisted that the horse's tail should be cut according to his directions.

"Not while I've got charge of the crittur," replied the overseer.

"Who is master here—you or I?" indignantly demanded the young man.

"I guess yew ain't—not by a darned sight."

"When I come in possession here, you will have to leave the place very suddenly."

"Wal, naow, if yew ever dew git to be the boss here, yew won't be bothered with me one haour. But I advise yew not to calkilate tew much onto that sort o' thing."

But there was a Tibbles who found favor in the eyes of Paul Delarosse, and that was Kitty.

He admired her immensely, and in return for his questionable admiration he had her best detestation.

The one person whom she despised and hated above all others was Paul Delarosse.

He had "pestered" her, as Kitty expressed it, on several occasions, calling her his "sweet little grisette," and making love to her in a fashion that did not please her a bit.

The day after the party, when Paul was a little flushed with liquor, he found Kitty alone in the garden, and began to press his unwelcome attentions upon her.

She tried to repulse him good-humoredly, but he grew more emphatic and more impudent.

"I have you here alone now," said he, "and you must give me a kiss, my pretty grisette."

"I ain't no greuse yet, nor grease anythin'," sharply replied Kitty. "Leave me alone, or you'll git into trouble."

"You sweet little rebel, I don't believe you mean half you say."

"I dew, though, and I jest hate yew, yew impident, black-faced, nasty foreigner! Oh, haow I dew hate foreigners!"

"But I am no foreigner, Kitty. I am a rich young American, and I can make you many nice presents. Give me a kiss, now, before I take it."

Kitty's face fairly blazed as he touched her.

"Go 'way, I say! Keep your hands off, or I'll scratch your nasty black eyes aout!"

"We will see about that, you little vixen."

Paul seized both her hands, but could not prevent her from opening her mouth, and Kitty's screech was something startling.

It hastened the steps of Fred Henning, who had seen them wrangling, and was coming toward them.

"You had better quit that, Mr. Delarosse," said he, as he laid his hand with a firm grasp on the young man's shoulder.

Paul dropped Kitty's hands, and stepped back, wrenching himself loose.

"Who gave you the right to interfere with me, you dirty, meddlesome hound!" he demanded insolently.

"Softer words would become you better," mildly answered Fred. "I have stood quite as much as I mean to stand from you, young man, and I warn you now that it will be healthy for you to go easy."

"You will have to stand this, you rascal," cried Paul, as he aimed a vicious blow at the other's face.

It was easily intercepted, and Flush Fred, stretching out his right arm, landed a stunner on his adversary's face, which sent him to grass.

He picked himself up, looking dazed as well as crestfallen, and his hand moved toward his pistol-pocket; but there was something in Flush Fred's look that stopped the motion, and he slowly walked away.

Kitty Tibbles had seized a hoe and brandished it, ready to rush to the rescue of her defender; but her valor was not called into action.

Her father met them as she was walking on with Fred, and Kitty told him the story of her unpleasant adventure.

"I'm bacad to have trouble yet with that young reprobate," said he; "but I don't want it to come just naow, though I'm sorry that you've got into the mess, Mr. Henning."

"It doesn't worry me a bit," replied Fred. "I am going away and I hope that your daughter will be able to keep out of that fellow's way hereafter."

"He had better keep out o' her way—that's where it is. If I should ketch him pesterin' her, he would be mighty apt to get hurt."

Flush Fred went direct to Leon Delarosse.

He told that gentleman that he must leave Gravelly Bayou, and mentioned as a sufficient reason for his departure his recent *rencontre* with Paul.

"As your nephew and I have come to blows," said he, "it is not proper for me to remain here any longer at present. I have no hard feeling toward him, but have good reason to believe that he dislikes me, and I am not willing to cause any unpleasantness here if I can help it. So I will take myself out of his way."

Leon Delarosse expressed his sorrow for this leave-taking, and his grief at the occurrence which was its immediate cause.

"I would much prefer your company to that of Paul," he said, "but he is my nephew, and I must try to look over his faults. I hope, Mr. Henning, that you will not forget me, but will come again to visit me, as you will always be heartily welcome here."

Fred was driven over to Martigny, the landing of the Gravelly Bayou region, which he found to be a mere hamlet, composed of a wood-yard, a small warehouse, a country store, a dreary tavern with a bar, and a few little houses.

As he waited there for an up-river boat, he noticed that he was curiously inspected by a man who seemed to be a boarder at the tavern.

This man was an elderly person, rather short in stature, but robust in build, with grizzled hair and beard, and swarthy, weatherbeaten face.

He had a foreign air, and his dress and general appearance were somewhat similar to those of a sailor who is ashore after a long cruise.

When the boat at last landed, this man and Fred Henning went on board together; but Fred neither saw nor heard anything more of him, and did not know at what town or landing he went ashore.

As for Flush Fred, he left the boat at Memphis, quitting for that purpose a game which promised to be profitable, and at once wrote and mailed a letter to a former friend of his in Tennessee.

The friend was a young planter named Arthur Helmsley, and he was the brother of the Kate Helmsley of whom Mrs. Brenner had spoken at Gravelly Bayou.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRIBE OF THE MOCCASINS.

PAUL DELAROSSE seemed to improve considerably in his disposition after the departure of Fred Henning.

He took in good part a pretty severe lecture from his uncle about his conduct toward Kitty Tibbles, attributing it to the heedless drinking of too much strong liquor, and promising to be more careful thereafter.

But he made the motive for this good behavior a little too apparent by applying to his uncle for money.

The old gentleman, who did not happen to have been born very recently, supplied him somewhat scantily, doubtless preferring to wait and see how long Paul would continue in his present mood.

Then the young man became sulky and morose again, and his manner would have fully justified Fred Henning, if Fred had been there to observe it, in again saying that he had something on his mind that ought not to be there.

One day he received a note in a securely sealed envelope, brought to the house by a black boy.

The note contained only these words:

"Want to see you bad. Be sure to come to-night."

Paul tore the note into small bits, and his face was dark and gloomy as he scattered them to the wind.

Then he applied to his uncle for more money, but did not get it.

"You can't need money here," said the old gentleman, "as there is no chance to spend it. You have got rid of a great many dollars lately, and I must shorten the supply for a while."

That night the young man went out alone and on foot.

Before leaving the house he freshly charged all the chambers of his revolver, which was, perhaps, not an unreasonable precaution for a man who intended taking a nocturnal ramble in that region.

He went down to the bayou, and walked along its shore a mile or so, in the shadow of the great trees and their hanging banners of moss.

Concealed under a bunch of bushes he found a small skiff, which he entered, and easily pulled himself across.

Near the point at which he landed there was

a small but neat cabin, about which a little patch of ground had once been cultivated, but was then abandoned to weeds and brush.

The shutters of the cabin were closed, but a faint light came through the chinks.

Paul knocked at the door, giving three deliberate raps, and it was opened cautiously.

"Is it you, then, at last?" said the gruff voice of a man. "Come in. Why are you so late?"

The young man pushed into the one room of the cabin, a scantily furnished and cheerless apartment, and seated himself, looking very sulky, in the best chair the house afforded.

Before him stood a short, stout and swarthy man, with the appearance of a sailor ashore—the same man who had so curiously inspected Fred Henning at Martigny.

"Why are you so late, I say?" that man demanded.

"Look here, now, Jonas Hexamer," testily replied Paul; "you may as well be a little more respectful. I have not come here to be run over. You have no business to say that it is late."

"But it is late, or seems so to me. If you had to be cooped up alone in such a hole as this, it would seem late to you."

"Nobody forces you to stay here. Why do you do it?"

"Because I wanted to see you, and this is the best place for us to meet."

"Well, I am here. What do you want?"

"Money, of course," growled Jonas Hexamer. "Didn't you know what I wanted?"

"Yes, I knew well enough what you wanted—better than I wish I did—and I have brought you all I could get. Here it is."

Paul handed his companion a roll of bills, which the other eagerly seized and counted.

Then his countenance fell.

"Fifty dollars!" he said with a sneer. "What can I do with such a paltry sum as that?"

"You had better ask what I can do without it," angrily replied Paul. "That is all the money I have, and all I could get."

"Bah! And you the heir of one of the best estates in Louisiana!"

"I have not got it yet, though, and in the mean time you are greatly mistaken if you think I find myself in clover. The old man wants to know what has become of all the money he has given me, as I have nothing to show for it. Shall I tell him that you get the greater part of it, and why I give it to you?"

"I should think he might be more liberal," muttered the other.

"So he might; but he is not. Just now he says that I need no money here, and I can't think of any way to draw it out of him."

"Tell him that you want to buy a horse," suggested Hexamer.

"I have tried that, and he says that he would prefer to see the horse and pay for it. I tell you, Jonas Hexamer, I am having a hard time, and my uncle is right cross with me."

"I am afraid that you don't try to make yourself agreeable to him."

"How can I? How can I make myself fond of this horrid, lonesome place, where all the people are dull and disagreeable, and where there is no amusement and nothing to my taste? Everybody about the plantation tries to set him against me, and lately he has had a gambler visiting there, a fellow named Henning. Since that scamp came, the old man has been harder on me than ever."

"I know!" eagerly exclaimed Hexamer. "I have been looking after your interests, my boy. I have seen that man, and I mean to watch him."

"There is another thing that makes me uneasy, Jonas. It is only lately that I got a hint of it by listening and piecing things together. There is a young lady, the daughter of my uncle's old sweetheart. He does not know that there is such a girl; but she is coming into this neighborhood soon, and he will be sure to find her out. Suppose he should take a great dislike to me, and should conclude to adopt that girl?"

"Nonsense! Is it likely that he would cut out his only relative for the sake of a stranger?"

"Not likely, I suppose, but queerer things have happened, and it frets me to have such a chance hanging over me."

"I know about that, too," observed Hexamer. "You do?"

"Yes, indeed. Do you suppose I am asleep or stupid? No; I am wide-awake and watchful. I know about the girl, and I tell you that she shan't trouble you. If there should be any danger, you shall marry her."

"She might not take me for a husband."

"Something else would happen, then. I have not thought it out yet; but I mean to look after her. Now, my boy, I want you to go with me, as I have something to show you."

"Where is it?"

"Out in the forest—in the swamp."

"I can't go into the swamp to-night, Jonas."

"But you must. I am going away to-morrow, and don't know when I will be back here. I want to show you those who will take care of you and help you, if you need help while I am gone. You can get into your house at night easy enough."

They left the cabin, the door of which Hex-

amer locked behind them, and struck out into the forest.

Though the night was not dark, it was dark enough under those great trees, with their spreading boughs and abundant leafage and plentiful streamers of moss; yet Jonas Hexamer made his way through it all as easily as if he had been born with the eyes of a wild beast.

After about an hour's tramp they reached a swamp, and there the darkness was so dense that it was impossible to see more than a few steps ahead.

Yet Hexamer went steadily on, stepping from hummock to hummock, or from one clump of cypress trees to a other, when that method of locomotion was necessary, and at the same time guiding the steps of his companion and helping him over the bad places.

They halted at the edge of a lagoon, which was probably the center or lowest portion of the swamp.

Its placid surface, black as ink in the night, was so suggestive of snakes and other reptiles, that Paul Delarosse shuddered as he looked at it, and said that he had got enough of the swamp and the darkness.

"We will soon be there now," answered Hexamer.

He raised a small whistle that hung from his neck, and blew three short and shrill blasts.

Paul, who grew impatient as they waited there, was startled at seeing a dark form suddenly appear before them, as if he had risen out of the swamp.

The form was that of a negro man, as black as ebony and hideous as an alligator.

"Dat you, boss?" asked the negro. "Who's t'udder one?"

"The other is my friend, Marius. I want to show him to the tribe of the Moccasins."

Marius glided away as silently as he had come, and the white men followed him.

Paul Delarosse could not for his life have remembered that route so that he could pick it up again and follow it alone.

Indeed, he did not know where they were going, or scarcely how they were going.

They seemed to be walking on the water, but not through the water, as they felt firm ground at every step they took, though they could not see it.

At last they reached what was really firm ground, and saw before them, partly hidden by the trees and bushes, two huts that were more like Hottentot Kraals than even the poorest kind of negro cabins.

Entering the largest of the huts, they found themselves in a low room with an earth floor, partly lighted by a wick that floated in a gourd of grease.

Six men were there, including their guide, and two women, all sitting on blocks of wood, or squatted on the clay floor.

One of the women was old and withered. The other was neither young nor old, and not ill-looking for a negress.

Two of the men were white men, and they were lean, sallow and dirty, the repulsive product of ague-cake and ignorance. But they had a fair amount of clothing, such as it was, while the others, who were negroes, were at least half-naked.

These were original and natural abolitionists—at least, the black ones were.

They had abolished slavery, as far as it concerned themselves, by escaping from its yoke.

At the same time they had gone back several degrees toward the barbarism of the Dark Continent, and did not lack much of being wild men.

Condemned to a life of hiding and prowling in remote and inaccessible localities, they had no chance to be anything else.

But they had not got over their old respect for the white man, generally considered as a master, and they all rose when Hexamer and Paul came in.

"I have brought Paul Delarosse to see the tribe," said Hexamer. "I want you to know him, because he may need your help, and he is able to pay for it. Take a good look at him, all of you, so that you will know him when you see him. He will have rum for you and other good things. I am going away, and when he wants you he will call for you. I give him this whistle now; you know its voice, and will obey it. He is the nephew of Leon Delarosse, and will be very rich some day, and then he will help and protect you all."

Jonas Hexamer made this speech much in the style of a traveler addressing a friendly tribe in Africa.

At its close there was an indistinct murmur, apparently of approbation, which was interrupted by a shrill and squeaking voice from the corner:

"He won't nebber touch none ob de Delarosse prop'ty—he won't."

"What do you mean by that, you cursed hag?" demanded Hexamer, turning fiercely upon her.

But the black men clustered around him and got in his way.

"Don't tetch ole Dinah," said one of them. "Whatebber you do, boss, don't tetch ole Dinah!"

CHAPTER X.

FLUSH FRED'S STREAK OF LUCK.

TIME passed slowly with Fred Henning at Memphis, and not at all pleasantly.

He considered that city his residence, and it was his favorite "stamping ground" when he returned from a cruise laden with the spoils of victory.

But on this occasion he was an infrequent visitor at his usual places of resort; he did not dally with the faro-banks, and entered into no games but such as were sure to be profitable to him.

Games of that class were not plentiful in Memphis, where the skill of Flush Fred was so well known that people were afraid to "tackle" him.

Fortunately he was not in need of money.

He had lately become careful of his gains, and almost economical, investing his spare funds in banks that were not dignified with Scriptural names, and just then he had a pretty good sum to his credit.

Just then, too, it may have seemed to him worth while to keep his money and add to it. There was more than one class of business, outside of card playing, in which he might succeed with the aid of a fair amount of capital, and thus eventually become as respectable as the gamblers in grain and stocks and cotton.

Mrs. Brenner had told him that reverses had befallen the Helmsley family, and was it not possible that they might bring Kate a little nearer to him?

At least it was possible that he might be able to befriend her.

But he was worried because he got no answer to the letter he had written to her brother, Arthur Helmsley.

He had told that young gentleman what he had heard in Louisiana, and had requested information as to the truth of the statements, especially as to whether Kate was going down into that country, and if so, when she was going.

But day after day passed, and he heard nothing from Arthur Helmsley.

Had his friend got above keeping up his acquaintance with a river gambler, or had his poverty made him too proud to speak of his misfortunes?

At last the answer arrived, and was quite satisfactory on those points.

Arthur Helmsley had been away from home, he said, and had but just returned to find Fred's welcome letter awaiting him.

It was true that he had met with reverses lately; but they were not serious, and he was still able to give his sister a good home as long as she wanted one.

But his mother had died since he last saw Fred Henning, and Kate, who had been moping for some time, afflicted with depression of spirits, rather than with failing health, seemed to need a change of air and of scene.

Therefore she had favorably considered Mrs. Brenner's request that she should visit Louisiana with the view of remaining there, and had left her home a few days before Arthur Helmsley's letter was written.

That was all the young gentleman had to say upon that point; but it was sufficient for Fred Henning.

Kate Helmsley had already gone down to Louisiana, and he had lost his faint chance of meeting her on the river.

Perhaps he might have passed her as he came up.

This intelligence made him more discontented with himself and with Memphis.

He was anxious to get away from there, and, as he had nobody to please but himself, and no ties of any description, it was only necessary to pack his valise and go.

Of course he did not care what direction he should take.

As the Sabine was then his favorite boat, and as she happened to be at the landing, and also happened to be bound down the river, it was natural that he should step aboard and take passage on her.

If he should happen to leave the boat at some landing on the Louisiana side, possibly convenient to Mrs. Brenner's plantation, that would be a twist of the wheel of fortune for which he could not be held accountable.

Yet, if he had been closely cross-examined, he might have confessed that a vague hope of meeting Kate Helmsley had prompted his trip and its direction.

He was gladly received by his old friends, the officers of the Sabine, and by several of his acquaintances among the passengers.

Not one of them was so enthusiastic and exuberant in welcoming him as a jaunty young Irishman, Dennis Malone by name, well known on the river and elsewhere as Denny the Drummer, who had come down on the Sabine, and was bound for the lower country.

He was a traveling salesman for a Louisville liquor house, and a very successful one, good-looking, jolly, bright as a new dollar, and as honest as his occupation would allow him to be, a general favorite with business men and the traveling-public.

"An' is it yerself, Freddy, me boy?" joyfully

exclaimed the Irishman. "I haven't set eyes on yez since the naygur wus hung, as the Hoosiers say, an' I couldn't be gladder to see the ghost av me grandmother."

It may be stated here that Denny, though a full-fledged American citizen by virtue of his papers of naturalization, had not attempted to get rid of his brogue, but was proud of it and inclined to cultivate it.

"You might have seen me easy enough, if you had been around anywhere," answered Fred. "But I heard that you were sick, flat on your back, and expecting to take a trip to that country where even Cincinnati whisky never freez-s."

"It's jokin' yez are, me daisy. Thru it is that I was down for a wake or so; but they didn't get a chance to wake me. To be honest wid yez, Fred, I had been tastin' me own samples too frayquintly, and that's bad for business. But Oi've quit it now intoirely, an' am contint to let other folks do the tastin', good luck to thim!"

"Glad to hear that you have reformed, Denny. Will you take a drink?"

"Wid playsure, me daisy, bein' as it don't come out av a sample case."

As the two men walked up to the bar the Sabine's big wheels began to revolve, and she backed out into the stream.

"Here's luck to yez Fred," said Denny, "and may it match the luck I dhramed av tor yez a bit ago."

"What was that, Denny?"

"I dhramed that yez was married, me boy, an' had a big plantation an' slathers o' money."

"But dreams go by contraries, you know."

"Bad 'cess to thim for that, thim!"

Flush Fred felt an inclination to visit the pilot-house, the scene of a somewhat famous exploit of his not long ago; but Denny the Drummer would not let him loose.

"An' phwere are yez goin' to this time, Fred?" inquired the Irishman.

"I don't know, indeed, and I can't say that I care."

"That's jist phwat's the matther wid meself, me daisy. It's loose on the worruld I am, and all's fish that comes to me net, and ivery part av the say is full av fish. I mane to sthick to yez, Freddy, me boy, an' land wid yez, an' folley yez. Be jabbers, there's luck in that."

"Come up to the pilot-house with me, then."

Fred had made another start toward the pilot-house, when his attention was attracted to a man who had boarded the boat at Memphis, but had not until then come within the range of his vision.

It was the same man whom he had noticed at the Martigny landing—the same man who had taken Paul Delarosse to the hiding-place of the refugees in the swamp—in fact, it was Jonas Hexamer.

Flush Fred might not have noticed him, if the man's eyes had not been fixed upon him with the same peculiar expression that he had observed at Martigny.

But he never forgot a face, and, when he caught that look again, he turned and stared at the man almost fiercely, as if he thought that he was being spied upon.

Jonas Hexamer's gaze wavered, then his eyes dropped, and he walked away.

"Who is that man, Fred?" asked the Irishman.

"I don't know; but I will be likely to find out, if I catch him staring at me in that style again. Come up to the pilot-house, Denny. We are going to have a lovely night."

Again Fred started in that direction, and again he was interrupted.

This time it was by a boy connected with the steward's department.

"A lady in the cabin would like to see you, sir," said the boy, as he handed Fred a card.

He actually blushed as he glanced at the card.

Then he hastily excused himself to Dennis Malone, and walked down the long saloon cabin with a brisk and eager step.

"Sure an' me dhrame is comin' thru," muttered Denny. "Now he is goin' to git married, an' I wondher phwere he will find the plantation an' the slathers av money."

Flush Fred blushed again when he reached the ladies' cabin in the stern of the boat, and there, seated on a sofa, bright and smiling, was Kate Helmsley!

CHAPTER XI.

THE WRECK OF THE SABINE.

KATE HELMSLEY was not a beauty, although she was beautiful.

That is to say, though her features were not perfect, she had fine eyes and lovely lips, an elegant and graceful figure, and a countenance that was wonderfully expressive of intelligence and amiability.

Her hair, too, was unusually fine and abundant, and her natural taste in dressing always set off her fine form to advantage.

It was no wonder that Fred Henning blushed when he approached her and took the hand which she offered him as she rose.

Indeed, it was a most amazing streak of luck that he should find her there, and yet more amazing that she should have sent for him.

He had counted it a "dead sure thing" that she had already reached Louisiana; but there she happened to be, on the very boat on which he had happened to take passage.

"Please bring up a chair, Mr. Henning," said she. "I want to talk to you face to face. I saw you down yonder, and was so glad that I could not help sending for you."

"You have done me a great favor," answered Fred; "but are you sure that you have been quite discreet?"

"Discreet? What do you mean?"

"You know that my business, if it may be called a business, is that of a card-player. I am known as a river gambler to most of the people on this boat, and perhaps—"

"Perhaps what, sir?"

"Perhaps you might not be willing to acknowledge my acquaintance here."

"Indeed, Mr. Henning! Do you think so poorly of me as that? I am not only glad to see you here, but am proud to claim you as an acquaintance. Do you suppose I have forgotten the time when you rendered such unselfish services to my people and others? If our fathers and brothers are pleased to associate with you, why should not we be equally pleased? Are we so much better than they, or so much worse?"

"You argue very well, Miss Helmsley; but the fact remains that men of my class are pretty much looked down upon, and it is my duty to warn you against them."

"Besides," continued Kate, pursuing her own train of thought, "I am here alone, and am naturally glad to meet somebody I know. By the way, Mr. Henning, you do not seem to be surprised at seeing me traveling alone."

"Oh, I know all about that. But I am surprised at finding you here, when I supposed that you were already in Louisiana."

"What do you know about my going to Louisiana?"

Fred told her of his meeting with Mrs. Brenner at Gravelly Bayou, of the letter he had written to her brother when he reached Memphis, and of the answer he had at last received.

"From what Arthur wrote," said he, "I concluded that you had left Memphis several days ago."

"I came to Memphis several days ago," she replied, "and stayed there with a friend while I was waiting for this boat. Do you know why I waited for the Sabine?"

Fred could not hit upon any particular reason, though he was sure that the Sabine was a good boat to wait for.

"Because, Mr. Henning, I had heard a story about this boat with which you were connected. It was a story which my friend in Memphis, who is a pilot's wife, was proud to tell, because it was about a man whose skill and bravery had saved the boat when the pilot fell dead at his post, and the man who took that pilot's place at a perilous crisis was not a pilot, either."

"Oh, that affair," remarked Fred, with another blush. "That was of no consequence."

"I suppose it was not, in your opinion, though other people make much of it. So I waited for the Sabine, you see, because that story made her seem like an old friend to me, and because I believed that on that account she must be a lucky boat. I am not used to traveling, you know, and have my prejudices."

"The Sabine is a very good boat and a reliable boat, Miss Helmsley, and I have no doubt that she will carry you safely to your destination."

There was every reason to believe that she would.

There was not the slightest visible ground for a suspicion that the Sabine was about to meet with a sudden and violent termination of her trip, such as should close her career as a steamboat.

She was a safe craft in every respect, and her officers and crew were of the best, and the pilot on duty was thoroughly reliable, and the river was at a good medium stage, and there were no special difficulties of navigation, and the night was clear and moonlit.

Yet fate had placed an obstruction in the way, where the keenest-eyed pilot would not suspect its existence, as it raised not the least ripple on the surface of the river, and the Sabine was heading directly for it when Flush Fred spoke so confidently.

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when there was a shock that made the big steamboat shiver from stem to stern, from keelson to pilot-house.

It was accompanied by the crashing and rending of timbers, and by cries of fear and shouts of command.

The Sabine, though under full headway, almost stopped at the instant of the shock, then went ahead a little, and then stopped entirely.

Hastily the bells had jingled at the engine amidships, and as soon as possible the great wheels ceased to move.

A scene of confusion and terror followed.

State-room doors flew open, tables and chairs were overturned, and passengers and waiters, all shouting or talking together, and some scarcely half-dressed, hurried toward the forward part of the cabin, to learn what had happened, or to seek a way of escape.

Kate Helmsley gave a little scream as the shock was felt, and started to rise; but a look at Fred Henning restored her self-possession.

He was sitting there quietly, as cool and calm as if nothing unusual had happened.

"We have picked up a snag," said he, "a bad one, I judge. Have the kindness to stay right where you are, on that sofa, while I go forward and see what the danger amounts to."

She obeyed him as a matter of course.

His words and his manner were sufficient to inspire her with a serene confidence in the result as regarded herself, whatever might have happened to the boat.

Fred walked down the cabin briskly, but not excitedly, and passed through the turbulent throng with no apparent effort.

He returned to Kate leisurely, and seemed to be as placid as when he had left her.

Yet there was sufficient cause for alarm, and it was no wonder that many of the passengers, even some of the crew, were clamoring for life-preservers, and making frantic efforts to do they knew not what.

In vain Captain Spillers was talking to them and endeavoring to calm them, assuring them that there was no immediate danger, and that their best hope of safety lay in keeping quiet and awaiting his orders.

As for the clerk, he was busy getting together his cash and his books.

The truth was that the Sabine had struck a peculiarly vicious snag, which was located just far enough below the surface of the water to do her the greatest possible damage.

It had torn a great hole in her hull at the bow, and she had impaled herself upon it so that there was no possibility of extrication.

Fortunately it had been too low to fly up into the boiler-deck and increase the calamity; but the water was rushing in at the hole in the bow, and it was to be expected that the Sabine would soon fill and sink.

But Flush Fred took matters so easily that he seated himself before he explained to Kate the extent of the disaster.

"It is worse than I thought it was," said he. "The old Sabine is bound to be a wreck, and this cabin here must soon be flooded, as her stern will be likely to sink in deep water. But there is a boat coming down to us, and I think, from the look of her chimneys, that it is the Royal Arch. She will take off the passengers easily enough, though there won't be much chance for anything else."

Kate Helmsley looked at him a little curiously.

Could there really be anything serious the matter, when he was so very cool about it?

"We must go up to the hurricane roof," said Fred. "Perhaps you had better take my arm." She was excited and very pale, though she tried to appear otherwise.

The noise and confusion at the forward part of the cabin was enough to upset her, in spite of the calmness of her companion.

She rose hastily, and took his arm, and he made a way for her through the crowd, and with others they ascended to the hurricane deck.

There were many people there, and more were coming; but there seemed to be nothing the matter with the Sabine until they looked below.

Then they saw that the water was running over the boiler deck at the bow.

Looking aft they saw that the stern of the Sabine was settling, and it was clear that she must soon sink, and then her upper works might be swept away by the swift current.

But the steamer from up the river, which Fred Henning had made out to be the Royal Arch, was close at hand, and another was approaching from below.

There could be no question of the safety of the lives, and perhaps some of the property might be secured.

The Royal Arch rounded to on the lower side of the Sabine, and began to take off her passengers.

Among those who were safely transferred was Kate Helmsley, and Fred Henning was at her side.

But she was no sooner in safety than an expression of pain clouded her features.

"How careless I have been!" she cried. "I ought to have behaved better; but I could not help getting excited."

"What is the matter?" asked Fred.

"I left my sachel on the sofa in the cabin. It contained all my money and my jewelry."

"I will go down and get it."

"You must not run any risk for my sake."

"There is no danger. The boat has not sunk as soon as I expected it to."

Fred was quite correct in saying that there was no danger, as the cargo of bags of grain had prevented the water from filling the hold as rapidly as it would otherwise have done, and the Sabine was still afloat.

He ran down into the cabin, and secured Kate Helmsley's sachel, which he found where she had left it, and also got his valise from his state-room.

When he reached the hurricane deck he discovered, greatly to his surprise and displeasure, that the Royal Arch had parted company with the Sabine.

She had taken off all the people who were in sight, and her captain was in a hurry to continue his trip.

Therefore she had backed away from the snagged steamer, and was preparing to turn when Flush Fred mounted to the hurricane deck.

On her upper guard he saw Kate Helmsley standing and gazing at the Sabine.

Near her stood the dark-featured man who had first attracted his attention at Martigny landing, and Fred could have sworn that there was a triumphant look on his face.

CHAPTER XII.

THERE HAS BEEN FOUL PLAY.

THE Sabine was sinking pretty rapidly just then; but Flush Fred did not consider himself in any danger, as a small steamboat was coming up the river, and was near at hand.

"An' so yez got lift, me b'ye," said a cheery voice near him, and he turned and saw Denny the Drummer.

"But how did you happen to get left?" inquired Fred.

"Jist beca'se I meant to shtick to yez, as I said I w'u'd. I mane to go phwere you go on this trip, an' phwere there's wan av us there's two, jist like snakes. But, be jabers, me b'ye, we'll both be goin' undher moighty soon now, if that little devil av a fly-up-the-creek don't put more life into its motions."

Indeed, the Sabine was fast settling down into the water, and the creaking, and straining and rending of timbers and the like, as the swift and turbid current rushed and swirled about and through her, portended a general break-up of the doomed steamboat.

But the little stern-wheeler came up in time to take off the two men, and her cross-eyed captain would have saved some of the property if there had been a chance.

There was no chance, and as she backed away from the wreck, the wounded Sabine gave up the struggle for life.

Soon there was nothing to be seen of her but the tops of her chimneys, her pilot-house, and a bit of the forward end of the hurricane roof.

The stern-wheeler proceeded on her way up the river, and Fred Henning insisted on being put off at the nearest landing, as he had a strong objection to going any further northward.

It was more than ever necessary, it seemed, that he should follow Kate Helmsley, and see that she reached her destination in safety.

There was no reason to suppose that the dark-featured man had any designs upon her, or was in any way connected with her fortunes; yet his presence there and his actions were somewhat peculiar, and it was only natural that Fred Henning should have an uneasy feeling concerning him.

Besides, he had Kate's sachel that contained her money and jewelry, and was anxious to restore it to her.

Dennis Malone left the stern-wheeler with him, and at a lonesome and unattractive landing they waited impatiently for a boat to take them down the river.

They got one at last, and continued their journey down-stream as far as Vidalia, where they went ashore, as that was the nearest landing to Mrs. Brenner's plantation, and it was to be supposed that Kate had left the Royal Arch there.

But a brief inquiry satisfied Fred that she had not been there.

In fact, the Royal Arch had made no landing at Vidalia.

Fred was greatly worried by this circumstance, and he confided to Dennis Malone his suspicions of the dark-featured man.

"I noticed that black-faced devil, mesilf," answered the Irishman, "an' I didn't like the looks av him at all at all. Whin you was talkin' wid the young lady back in the cabin, he stood there glowerin' at both av yez, an' I wondered phwat he had to do wid yez."

"I don't know the man, Denny, and I can't guess what he could have to do with either of us; but I must confess that his looks and actions have made me suspicious of him."

"An' phwat are yez goin' to do now, me b'ye?"

"I am going to find out whether Miss Helmsley has reached the place she was intending to go to."

Fred got a horse and buggy from his friend, Antoine, and drove with Dennis to Mrs. Brenner's plantation.

He did not forget, by the way, to pay the Creole the amount of a bet he had made with him on a previous occasion.

At Mrs. Brenner's another disappointment awaited him.

Kate Helmsley was not there.

Mrs. Brenner was expecting her about that time, but had not seen or heard anything of her.

She and her family were greatly troubled by Fred Henning's account of the loss of the Sa-

bine, and of his so far fruitless search for the missing girl.

"What in the world can have become of her?" exclaimed Mrs. Brenner.

"An answer to that question could be nothing but guesswork," replied Fred. "It is possible that she was carried on down the river; but it is not likely if she insisted on stopping at Vidalia, as she naturally would. Perhaps she has been persuaded to go further on; but I can't imagine why she should do so."

"Are you afraid, then, that she has met with foul play, Mr. Henning?"

"I hope there has been nothing of the kind; but I must confess that I am troubled, and I shall not be easy until I find her."

Mrs. Brenner was anxious to place at his disposal all the resources of her plantation, in money and men; but Fred was of the opinion that he would need no assistance in the search.

"My friend and I will go to Martigny," he said. "If we do not find Miss Helmsley there, or hear from her, I must follow the Royal Arch down the river. You may depend upon it that I will do everything that can possibly be done to find her."

He left Kate's sachel at Mrs. Brenner's, and drove away with Dennis Malone, taking a trusty negro man on horseback to act as a guide.

At Martigny they found a clew without any difficulty.

But such a clew!

It only increased Fred Henning's uncertainty, and doubled his distress.

The Royal Arch had landed at Martigny, and two of the people who had been taken from the Sabine had come ashore there.

One of them was Kate Helmsley, and the other was the dark-featured man who had excited Fred's suspicions.

These points he got from the man who kept the little tavern there, and further information was readily forthcoming.

The two came ashore together, and seemed to be quite friendly, going at once to the tavern, but only stopping there long enough to get a suitable conveyance to take them into the country.

They told the story of the Sabine disaster, and the young lady said that she had followed the advice of her companion in landing at Martigny rather than at Vidalia, as he assured her that it was more convenient to Mrs. Brenner's plantation.

As a matter of fact it was neither so near nor so convenient; but the young lady had probably been influenced by her fellow-passenger, who proposed to take care of her and see her safely to her destination.

In response to Fred Henning's questions the tavern-keeper said that he was well acquainted with the dark-featured man, whose name was Jonas Hexamer, and who had frequently stopped at that hostelry.

He was regarded as a quiet, respectable man, though a little outlandish, who always seemed to have plenty of money, paid his bills promptly, and interfered with nobody.

It was not known where he came from, or what business he had there.

The tavern-keeper did not appear to be one of the inquisitive kind.

As soon as a conveyance could be got ready Jonas Hexamer had driven away with the young lady.

It was morning when they landed at Martigny, and at least an hour before noon when they left the tavern.

At night, but not long after nightfall the man had brought back the horse and buggy, saying that he had taken the young lady to Mrs. Brenner's plantation.

He paid his bill, and went away.

The tavern-keeper had not seen him since that day, and did not know what had become of him.

"Why, that was yesterday morning!" exclaimed Flush Fred. "Yesterday morning, and they would surely have reached Mrs. Brenner's place before night, if they had gone there. Yet neither the man nor the young lady has been seen by her."

The tavern-keeper was astonished.

This was a strange and most unexpected phase of the affair; yet he was unwilling to believe that his friend Jonas Hexamer, the quiet man who always paid his bills promptly, could have been guilty of any foul play.

All he could say was that there must have been some mistake.

Fred was quite sure that there had been no mistake, and what could the conclusion be but that Kate Helmsley had met with foul play?

CHAPTER XIII.

A CLOSE BUT FRUITLESS SEARCH.

FRED HENNING soon exhausted his efforts to discover the whereabouts of the missing Kate Helmsley.

That is to say, though he had no thought of abandoning the search, all his attempts to find a clew were fruitless, and he did not know where to turn or what to do.

He had ascertained beyond a doubt—though it was nothing more than he had expected—

that she had not reached Mrs. Brenner's plantation or any house in that vicinity.

It was useless to try to trace the course of the Martigny buggy over a road that was continually traveled by various teams.

Though it was a road that was considerably used, there were few houses directly on it, and no person could be found along the line of that road, or anywhere in the neighborhood, who remembered seeing the young lady or Hexamer or the buggy.

The search for Jonas Hexamer was equally barren of result.

Since he brought back the buggy that he had hired at Martigny, he had dropped out of the knowledge of everybody in that vicinity.

On that occasion, according to the report of the tavern-keeper, there had been nothing unusual in his speech or demeanor.

He had simply mentioned the fact that he had taken the young lady to her destination, and had paid his bill, and had left the house.

It was certain that he had not boarded any steamboat at Martigny landing, and had not procured any conveyance in the neighborhood to take him away from there.

He had not departed by any known means of departure, but had simply disappeared.

Baffled at all points, but never willing to confess himself defeated, Fred took his friend Dennis Malone to the house of Leon Delarosse, from which point he intended to make a fresh start.

Dennis was quite willing to go there, or to remain in the neighborhood with Fred any reasonable length of time.

"Between you an' me, Fred," said he, "many's the basket an' case an' keg an' bar'l I've sold to thim rich planters, an' it's aisy they are to sell to, whin they wance know a man. An' thin, me boy, I'm half crazy to git the wallerpin' av that black-faced devil that med away wid the young lady."

At the Delarosse plantation their news had preceded them.

Indeed, their search, quietly as it was conducted, had made such a stir that nearly everybody in the neighborhood had got more or less of a hint of it.

Leon Delarosse, glad as he was to see Fred Henning, could hardly stop to shake hands with him before he plunged into the subject.

"How is this, friend Henning?" he eagerly demanded. "I hear that you are mixed up in it. Whatever it is, I am thundering glad that it has brought you back here, as I have been quite broken up without you."

Fred could hardly get a chance to introduce Denny the Drummer.

"Glad to see him," said the planter. "Ever so glad. All he has to do is to make himself at home here. If he don't know how to do that you must teach him."

"If there's anny wan thing I know better than another, it's that very thing," interposed Denny.

"Tell me, now, Henning," put in the eager planter, "if the young lady you have been looking for is really a Miss Helmsley of Tennessee. Of course any young lady who was lost or in distress would have my sympathy and assistance; but the name of Helmsley has a strong attraction for me, and I take a lively interest in it."

"Helmsley is her name, Mr. Delarosse, and Tennessee is her home," answered Fred. "I will tell you the whole story, if you will sit down and allow me to do a reasonable share of the talking."

The planter had already ordered to be brought out on the front porch the usual hospitable assortment of bottles, glasses, cigars and other items supposed to be necessary for the entertainment of his guests, and he sat down to join them in refreshing themselves.

Dennis Malone refrained for the time from informing his host that he could supply him at reasonable prices with much better articles in the way of wines and liquors.

Fred Henning told who Kate Helmsley was, where she came from, and all he knew about her people.

"That's it!" exclaimed the planter. "Her mother is the one I spoke to you about, Henning. She was Susan Brenner, one of the Brenners of these parts, and I knew her well, and have good cause to remember her. And so she is dead now—Lord rest her!—and it is her daughter who is missing so mysteriously. Well, my young friend, she must be found, if she is on top of the earth, and whoever is responsible for her disappearance must be severely punished. Everybody on this plantation shall be at your service in the search, from Mr. Tibbles down to myself, and including my nephew. Of course Paul will be glad to assist in such a good cause."

Paul Delarosse was one of the party on the porch.

He had received Fred Henning and his friend very ungraciously, but was willing enough to drink with them, or with anybody else, or with himself.

When he was thus appealed to he manifested a friendly and helpful disposition that was a surprise to the others.

He declared that he was not only ready but anxious to join in the search, and that nothing could give him more pleasure than to be instrumental in finding the young lady.

Everything was satisfactory so far, and extensive operations were begun as soon as possible.

General Brayham, who was sent for, came over with his wife, and Mrs. Brenner came without being sent for.

Fred Henning had already forwarded to Kate Helmsley's brother in Tennessee the sad news of her disappearance, and Arthur Helmsley might soon be expected on the ground.

Mrs. Brenner was quite unnerved. In the course of a long and tranquil existence in that delightful locality she had never heard of such an occurrence, and would not have believed it to be possible if it had not been brought home to her.

She did not know what to do, and was quite incapable of making any practical suggestions; but, if money and men could accomplish anything, all the resources of her plantation were at the disposal of the searchers.

General Brayham was also liberal and enthusiastic, and his indignation blazed out in the wildest and most impossible projects.

"Begad, sir," exclaimed the impulsive old gentleman, "nothing of the kind has ever happened here before, and I would not have had such a stain cast upon the credit of the neighborhood for half my estate. The honor of Louisiana must be redeemed, sir, at any cost, and it is my opinion that we should lay low every acre of forest, and search every foot of swamp land, until we find the young lady. The work must be done thoroughly, sir, thoroughly."

Such a scheme, to say nothing of its interference with the rights of property, would have involved the employment of an army of men.

But General Brayham was a relic of the last war with England, and was generally regarded merely as an interesting fossil, whose opinions passed without special attention.

Besides, it was not by any means certain that Kate Helmsley, if alive, was anywhere in that region.

She might have been taken to a landing further down the river, and shipped southward on some unexplainable pretext.

Flush Fred was determined to cover all the ground, and in his operations to that end he found his best ally in Zeke Tibbles, whose knowledge of the country and its inhabitants, combined with his keen practical sense, made him the fittest person that could be found to superintend the search.

Leaving the Yankee to direct the movements of the plantation hands in the Martigny region and about Gravelly Bayou, Fred and Dennis Malone made their way down the west bank of the river, stopping at every town and landing and wood-yard for a considerable distance, and carefully inquiring concerning Kate Helmsley.

They found nowhere the slightest trace of her or of Jonas Hexamer, and Fred was completely disheartened when they returned to Gravelly Bayou.

There they were met by Arthur Helmsley, who had been warmly welcomed and hospitably entertained by Mr. Delarosse, and who had at once put all his spirit and energy into the search that was being prosecuted by Zeke Tibbles.

"I never saw you look so thoroughly pulled down, Fred," said Arthur Helmsley, as he pressed the hand of his stanch friend.

"I was never before so badly pulled down," replied Fred. "The unaccountable and utter disappearance of your sister has slaughtered me, and I am now so worried and perplexed that I go about like a man in a dream, hardly knowing what I am doing."

Fred went over for his friend the story of his meeting with Kate and their broken trip on the Sabine.

He related all the particulars with the greatest minuteness, and the two carefully canvassed every occurrence, in the hope of hitting upon something that might give them a hint of the cause and manner of Kate's disappearance; but they found nothing.

"Who can have had any purpose to serve by spiriting her away?" asked Arthur.

"That is the riddle which I have vainly tried to solve. It can only be answered by finding her."

"If she is alive, Fred."

"Yes, if she is alive; or by finding the scoundrel who has done the deed. The chance is a dark one now; but I will never cease looking for him, and when I do find him I will pull the truth out of him if I have to use red-hot pincers."

"And then?"

"And then, Arthur, if there is a hell he shall hunt it and find it."

CHAPTER XIV.

A FIND AND AN IDEA.

ZEKE TIBBLES in the mean time had made a find.

It was not much of a find, but was something, and might lead to something more.

As he explained it to Fred Henning, there was a cabin on the other side of the bayou which had been erected by a Frenchman, or possibly a New Orleans Creole, named Carsanne.

This Carsanne had occupied the cabin but a few months, and had then left the country, and was supposed to have gone to New Orleans.

In the course of his search for the missing Kate Helmsley the Yankee had come across the Carsanne place, and, perceiving about it evidences of recent occupation, his curiosity had been excited.

After a little hesitation he forced an entrance and found nothing in the cabin but some scanty furniture, which had probably been left there by the Frenchman.

"But I guess it wa'n't long since somebody had been livin' there," said Tibbles. "Cookin' an' sleepin' had been goin' on there, as nigh as I kin kalkilate, not more'n tew weeks ago. Among the rubbish I found this bit of paper, which kinder tells a leetle story."

The bit of paper was a receipt of a small amount of money in full for three months' rent of the tenement in which it was found.

It was in favor of Jonas Hexamer, and was signed by Alphonse Carsanne.

This find only served to locate the abode of Jonas Hexamer while he was in the neighborhood and was not stopping at Martigny.

It did not seem to assist the search for Kate Helmsley; but Fred Henning was of the opinion that it might eventually prove useful.

His investigations had settled him in the opinion that the missing young lady, alive or dead, was still somewhere in the neighborhood of Gravelly Bayou and Martigny.

If she was alive, she was concealed somewhere, and the man who was responsible for her disappearance must be not far away.

Fred's reasoning proceeded always upon the supposition that she was alive.

Not because he had any ground for such a supposition, but simply because he was unwilling to admit any other.

If Hexamer was in the vicinity, he might be expected to visit the cabin across the bayou at some time.

This was a bare possibility; but, in order that no chance should be lost, Fred decided that the cabin must be watched.

As Zeke Tibbles had made a find, so Denny Malone, shortly after his return from the southward expedition, developed an idea.

Denny was noted for an abundance of ideas, and sometimes they were valuable, and always they were worth attention.

This one he explained to Fred Henning and Arthur Helmsley after a fashion of his own.

"Thru' it is, Friddy me b'ye, that there's somethin' in the shtory av the ackshins av the birrd."

"Don't start any conundrums, now. What bird are you speaking of?"

"An' phwat birrd should it be but the wounded birrd that iverybody's heard about, ayven thim that hasn't seen it? Sure an' yez know well how it wurruks its racket."

"I must be very dumb, Denny, as I don't catch your meaning."

"Dumb's no name for yez. It's the birrd that has a nest in the grass or the bushes, an' phwen yez go near the nest it makes belave it's wounded, an' it hops away, dhrappin' its wing like. Thin yez thry to ketch the birrd. Iverybody does it—it's jist like kickin' an' ould hat that's full o' bricks. Not a man will miss givin' it a kick, though every wan av thim knows the trick."

"Come away from the hat, Denny, and get back to the bird."

"It looks loike it's aisy enough to ketch the birrd; but the shmart little cuss jist kapes ahead av yez, hoppin' an' limpin' along, an' makin' the devil's own fuss, till it gits yez a good way off from its nest, an' thin up it jumps an' flies away, and all av a suddint yez dhrap onto the racket."

"Yes, Denny, we all know that bird; but what has it to do with the present company or the business we have in hand?"

"It's bad for yez to be dumb an' blind both, me b'ye. Supposin', now, that we put young Black an' Crusty in the place av the birrd."

"Who is young Black and Crusty?" inquired Arthur Helmsley.

"Paul Delarosse, av coorse. I've been suspictin' him all along, but couldn't for the life av me guess phwat it was I was suspictin' him av."

"What are you suspecting now?"

"Iverythin' in ginerel, an' nothin' in partickilar; but it's moighty quare."

Fred Henning got out of patience with what at the moment seemed to him to be nothing but nonsense, and he insisted upon bringing the Irishman's idea to a focus.

"What do you mean, Denny?" he demanded. "Quit beating about the bush, and come to the point."

"As the thistle said to the bumblebee. Now, Frid, an' haven't yez noticed the quare ways av young Black an' Crusty while this s'arch has been goin' on? I've seen the performance twice, and have heard that it happened more'n wance whin we was away."

"What performance? What has happened?"

"The young nabob has been up an' up wid us in the s'arch. There's no denyin' that, an' I give the divil his due all the time. But he has his own way av helpin', and in wan pint it amounts to hinderin'. Both av yez know the road beyant the bayou."

"We ought to, by this time," answered Fred.

"Phwere that road meks a turn on the high level to go toward the north, a sort av a blind road lades off westward loike. We've niver folleyed that thrack yit, an' phwy? Jist beca'se the young nabob, whiniver we've shtarted to folley it, has said it wasn't any use, or that it only led to the swamp, or has tuck us off on anither trail. This mornin', whin we was goin' in there, he hurt his fut, an' med us fetch him home."

Fred had a lively recollection of that eyent, and so had Arthur; but each of them was disposed to regard it merely as an accident.

"They's been too many accidents loike that," continued the Irishman. "His ackshins is jist the same as those av the birrd, and if he could be supposed to have a nest hid anywhere, I'd know how to mek it out. But phwat rayson could young Black an' Crusty have for doin' away wid the young leddy?"

"As much reason as anybody," quickly answered Fred. "More reason than anybody I know of. That is to say, if I know of anybody who could have a reason for doing away with her, it is Paul Delarosse."

Dennis Malone's eyes snapped as this disclosure came out, and Arthur Helmsley was eager to hear more.

"There is just this about it," replied Fred. "Mr. Delarosse, when he was a young man, seems to have been deeply in love with a young lady who afterward married your father, Arthur Helmsley—in fact with your mother. It was on account of her rejection of his suit that he never married. I have reason to believe that he has always loved her fondly, and it is natural to suppose that he would have a tender feeling for her daughter."

"He has brought home young Black and Crusty, as Dennis calls him, with the intention of making the young chap his heir; but there is no real affection existing between them, and I believe that the old gentleman has been daily growing more disgusted with his nephew."

"I have heard nothing from him on the subject besides the story of his former love for Miss Helmsley's mother; but it is quite possible that on some occasion when Mr. Delarosse was angry with his nephew, he may have said more than that to Paul, and may even have threatened to discard him and leave the estate elsewhere."

"It is not at all likely," demanded Arthur Helmsley, "that he would discard his own flesh and blood—his only living relation—for a mere sentimental notion."

"Stranger things than that have happened, Arthur. But what I have said on that point was merely guesswork. I only wanted to show you that when it became known that Miss Helmsley was coming into this neighborhood, jealousy may have given Paul Delarosse a reason for objecting to her presence here. That is, he had a reason for wishing her away, if anybody had."

"There is something in that, but nothing worth considering seriously," remarked Helmsley. "The only person we really know of in connection with my sister's disappearance is that Jonas Hexamer."

"Just so, and we have no right to connect Paul Delarosse with him in any way. I don't believe the young man has the grit to plan or take part in an abduction, and I know that he has not been out of the neighborhood since I left here. I have looked into that matter, and every day of his time is accounted for."

It was agreed that no suspicion attached to the young man, and that it would be improper and unfair even to mention the subject to his uncle.

"But he acted jist like the birrd," insisted Dennis Malone. "Mebbe he's got a nest av his own hid away. Annyhow, me b'yes, the next toime we go out we must take the thrail I shpoke av."

CHAPTER XV.

A WATCHER WATCHED.

THE next day the main party of searchers started out on what Dennis Malone had styled "the road beyant the bayou."

In the party were Fred Henning, Arthur Helmsley, Dennis Malone, Zeke Tibbles, and a stout negro man.

Paul Delarosse appeared to be anxious to accompany them, and doubtless was.

In fact, there was nothing that could be alleged against the young man in his entire connection with the affair.

His exertions had been so intelligent, so indefatigable, and at the same time so unpretending, that his uncle had been positively charmed by his conduct.

At the same time he had won the good-will of Arthur Helmsley, had disarmed the suspicions of Fred Henning, and had conciliated every-

body but the Irishman, whose dislike grew with acquaintance.

But on this occasion, in spite of Dennis's doubts, there could be no doubt that he was really lame, and he was obliged to stay at home, while the others went searching.

They reached the place where the road beyond the bayou made its turn to the northward and halted there.

"This is the pint phwere the young gentleman did be shtoppin' us," observed Dennis. "He told us there was nothin' but shwamp beyant here."

"He was right abaout that," said the overseer. "Come on an' see fur yewrself."

Dennis went on with the rest, but had not gone far when he wished that he had not taken a step in that direction.

It was quite true that there was nothing but swamp beyond there, and an impassable swamp at that.

A swamp sucker, to the manner born and bred, could pick his way through a portion of it, and the negro man whom Tibbles had brought was a fairly good guide.

But the task of traversing it was anything but an inviting one.

Even in the daytime darkness prevailed, rather than daylight, and the funereal looking trees with their somber drapery of moss were almost as terrifying as the still lagoons, whose placid surface was stirred only by the passage of numbers of snakes.

As for walking, that was only jumping from one hummock or log or clump of cypress shoots to another, at the risk of slipping into the slimy water or falling upon some unnoticed reptile.

"Och, millia murther!" shrieked the Irishman, as he quickly drew himself back from contact with a fat and sluggish moccasin snake, his ruddy countenance expressive of the intensest horror.

"If the blissid St. Patrick had iver kem across this place, he'd 'a' flung away his crook an' skipped the country. I almost set me fut this minnit on the king av all the shnakes."

"Lucky yew didn't," remarked the Yankee.

"That was a cotton-macuth."

"Be jabers his mouth would bould a bale av cotton, an' bad cess to it! Let's git away from this widout sayin' how-d'y-do or good-by to anny more av thim."

The others were quite willing to refrain from prosecuting the search any further in that direction, and they backed out as rapidly as circumstances would allow.

Dennis Malone was crestfallen and disgusted.

"I thought I was goin' to find a birrd's nest," said he; "but it turned out to be a mare's nest."

Flush Fred was also discouraged and disheartened; but no amount of failures could cause him to cease or intermit his efforts.

In pursuance of his purpose of watching the cabin across the bayou, he went over there the night after the swamp trail had been abandoned.

On this expedition he preferred to go alone, to diminish the danger of discovery by any person who might happen to approach the locality.

He had already discovered the skiff that was concealed on the plantation side of the bayou, and he used it to ferry himself across, as he had done on several previous occasions.

The night was not dark, as there was a piece of a moon hung in the sky, but it shone fitfully and at intervals, through broken masses of cloud, rendering distances deceptive and shadows uncertain.

All was quiet about the cabin—nothing to be heard but the occasional creak of a frog, or the harsh cry of a marsh bird.

The stillness and loneliness of the night were strongly suggestive of the obscurity that covered the disappearance of Kate Helmsley, and it was natural that they should bear upon Flush Fred with an oppressive weight, reminding him of the present fruitlessness and future hopelessness of his search—of the apparent impossibility of finding any sort of a needle in that haystack of forest and swamp.

He took his station behind the broad trunk of a live-oak, from which position he could have the best view attainable of the cabin and the cleared ground near it.

At the same time he was invisible, except from one direction.

He waited there fully an hour, and a very long hour, before anything occurred to attract his attention.

This was the third night he had watched the cabin, and his vigils had been very tedious.

If they had not been so hopeless, they might have been more pleasant.

At last he heard an unusual and unmistakable sound in the forest.

It was the breaking of a twig, as if it had been stepped on.

There were no animals, wild or tame, that were likely to be in that vicinity at that hour—at least, none that were large enough to produce such a noise as that.

Consequently he attributed it to the near presence of some human being.

He peered out from behind the big trunk of his oak, and thought he saw the form of a man flitting from one tree to another at a little distance.

Yet it might have been an illusion, caused by the shadows cast by the intermittent moonlight.

He stepped forth from his concealment, believing that the man, if it was a man, was near enough to be captured, or at least to be halted by a pistol-shot.

As he did so, he perceived that the intruder was equally on the alert with himself, and had even got ahead of him.

A shot rung through the forest, and the flash was clearly visible.

Another followed immediately, and Fred felt a sharp twinge in his left arm.

It was plain that the watcher had been watched, and that the intention was to kill him or to scare him off.

Here at last was something practical and palpable as a result of his vigils—a clew that must be seized and followed up.

But he did not stop an instant to reflect upon the cause or sequence of the shooting.

Angered and eager, he ran in the direction of the sound and the flash, firing twice as he went.

There was something to fire at.

He then clearly saw the dark form of a man, who left the shelter of a tree, and bounded away through the forest.

Neither of Fred's shots seemed to touch him, and there was no chance to fire again, so swiftly did the fugitive make his way westward into the thickest of the forest, so as to keep the trunks of the trees between himself and his pursuer.

But Fred pressed on, eagerly seeking a chance for a shot that would count.

Swiftly as he ran, the man he was chasing was too swift to be caught, and probably too well acquainted with the intricacies of the forest labyrinth.

Fred was soon sure that he had lost the slippery shadow, as he neither saw nor heard anything more of him.

He stopped, but looked and listened in vain.

The forest was as quiet as a graveyard.

He had been almost sure of seizing a clew, of gaining a point, but the opportunity had eluded him.

It was difficult to believe that it was Jonas Hexamer whom he had been pursuing.

The dark-featured and somewhat elderly man whom he had twice seen and closely noticed was too heavy of build and too slow of motion to have escaped him so easily.

Yet who else could have had a purpose to serve in trying to kill him or scare him away?

No person, surely, but one who was responsible for the disappearance of Kate Helmsley, or who wished to end the efforts of the chief of the searchers.

As he reflected on these points he sat down at the foot of a tree to rest.

But he heard a rustling in the undergrowth near by, and rose hastily.

Not soon enough to meet the onslaught of two men who suddenly threw themselves upon him.

CHAPTER XVI.

SATAN'S ASSISTANCE.

FLUSH FRED's first sensation was that of being struck on the head, as if by a club.

The blow was a hard and heavy one, sufficient to knock him down, but not to stun him.

The instinct of self-preservation was strong within him, and he struggled to his feet, striving to shake off the grasp of his assailants.

But they were both strong and active men, either one of them fully a match for him in a fair contest.

By the fitful moonlight he could see that one of them was a negro, and the other seemed to be a white man.

Again he was struck, though not with a club, and the combined efforts of his antagonists forced him to the ground.

As he fell he let out his voice in a far-reaching cry for help.

Of course he could not expect to bring any one to his assistance in that wilderness; but it was natural to yell.

He was answered by the deep voice of a hound near at hand—a voice that seemed to be familiar to him.

At the same time there was a manifest commotion among the two ruffians who had piled themselves on top of him, and their grasp relaxed.

The next instant it was their turn to yell and shriek, as an immense dog leaped upon them, and added himself to the buddle.

"Seize 'em, Satan!" shouted Fred. "Seize 'em, Satan!"

Then he heard a clear and manly voice, which he also recognized, calling the dog.

Satan obeyed the order instantly, and fell back, growling, while the two ruffians picked themselves up, and scampered away.

Flush Fred sat up at the foot of the tree, and felt of his head, which was whirling as if a cyclone had been started within it.

He saw his assailants running off as fast as their legs would carry them, and reached for

his pistol, wishing to give them a parting shot; but it had fallen to the ground, and he could not easily find it.

Right before him, seated on his haunches, and making mute demonstrations of friendship, was Saul Stiner's great hound, Satan.

A little way off was Saul Stiner himself, coming on at a lope, with a shotgun in his hand.

"Is it you, Mr. Henning?" exclaimed the swamp sucker, as he halted near the dog.

"What is the matter? What are you doing out here in the woods?"

"Trying to get my wits together just now," answered Fred. "I wouldn't have been doing anything much longer, if Satan had not come to my help in time. Those scoundrels would have made carrion of me."

"Who were they?"

"I don't know, I wish I did. One was a nigger, and the other may have been a white man. I wish you hadn't called the dog off. If he had held one of them, I might have learned something that I would be very glad to know."

"He seems to have worried them some, judging by the spots of blood on the ground. I called him off because I hate to have him tear men. Are you hurt, Mr. Henning?"

"I don't believe I am—nothing to speak of, anyhow, my head got a hard knock or two; but it is tough as a pine knot. Come to think of it, my left arm is a little stiff, I was shot at a while ago, and must have been hit."

The hit had evidently not disabled him, as he easily pulled off his coat, and Saul Stiner rolled up his shirt sleeve and examined the hurt.

It was only a slight flesh wound, hardly more than a graze, just enough to draw the blood pretty freely, and when the swamp sucker had bound it up with a handkerchief Fred felt no inconvenience from it.

Saul was naturally anxious to know what had led to the encounter, and Fred was quite willing to tell him.

Indeed, there was a special reason why he should acquaint the swamp sucker with his business there, and it was strange that he had not thought of it before.

He had cause to consider Saul Stiner his friend, and Saul, by his habitation and his pursuits, must be thoroughly acquainted with that region, including its most inaccessible portions of forest and swamp.

Therefore Saul must be well qualified to assist him in his search. Indeed, nobody in that neighborhood was likely to be better qualified than the swamp sucker.

There was Satan, too, a dog of undoubted ability as a trailer, a hunter, and a protector.

It would naturally be supposed that Saul would be one of the first persons to whom Fred would apply, and it was strange that he had not thought of that before.

To be sure, he could not have found his way back to David Stiner's abode without a guide, and Saul had hinted that he would prefer to keep away from Gravelly Bayou.

But these considerations would have presented no real difficulties if he had thought of applying to Saul.

The fact was that he had not thought of him in that connection, and he blamed himself severely for having overlooked so important a factor in the problem he had been trying to solve.

But, with Saul and Satan there before him, he proceeded to tell the whole story of Kate Helmsley's disappearance, with all the facts and particulars that were or might be more or less intimately related to that mystery, winding up with the encounter which the arrival of Satan had terminated.

This narration took time, and it was lengthened by the interruptions of Saul, who was anxious to have clear and connected ideas of everything as he went along.

Fred concluded by asking for the assistance of Saul in the search, promising him that he should be well paid for his labor and loss of time.

"You may count on me," cheerfully replied Saul. "I will be glad to do all I can to help you, and so will Satan. Neither of us will want any pay, though, and you mustn't speak of that again, Mr. Henning. I don't need any money, and will be right well pleased to take up that sort of a hunt, unless the old man objects, and I don't believe he will."

Flush Fred expressed his thankfulness, and the prospects of the search already began to look brighter.

"I wonder, now—" said Saul, with a little hesitation. "Yes, it may be. It is possible, anyhow, that something I lately found may furnish a point in this affair."

"What is that, Saul?"

"A locket that I picked up the other day in the woods, near the edge of the big swamp."

"Where is it?"

"Oh, I've got it with me. It is good-luck, you know, to find that sort of thing, and I carry it wherever I go."

The swamp sucker showed a small gold locket, hung from his neck by a leather string, and Fred examined it carefully by such light as the moon afforded.

There was no inscription upon it, nor anything about it to indicate its former ownership; but Fred Henning thought that he recognized it.

"I believe it is Miss Helmsley's," he said. "I am almost sure that I have seen her wear it, and yet I am not quite sure. Can't you bring it over to the Delarosse plantation in the morning, and show it to her brother?"

"I don't want to go there," answered Saul.

"Why not?"

"Well, the old man is kinder prejudiced against that place. But you can take it and show it to him, Mr. Henning. I would trust anything to you."

"Thank you, Saul. I would also like to know where you found it. I want to see the exact place. Could you take me to it?"

"Of course I could, and I will do so with pleasure."

An appointment was made for the morning, and Fred Henning took the locket to Gravelly Bayou to show it to Arthur Helmsley.

Arthur recognized it at once.

It was his sister's locket. She had worn it when she left home, and Flush Fred was sure that she was wearing it when he met her on the Sabine.

The next morning Saul Stiner was met at the appointed place by Fred Henning, Arthur Helmsley, and Dennis Malone.

All were eager to see the place where the locket had been found, as from that point they expected to start the search anew.

Saul led them through the forest over the track which they had followed at the instigation of Dennis Malone—the track which led to the swamp—the route which they had abandoned because it was impracticable and dangerous.

They did not go as far as they had gone on the previous occasion, halting at the edge of the swamp, and Saul pointed out the exact spot where the locket had been found, near the trunk of a fallen tree.

There was nothing in this besides a reasonable certainty that Kate Helmsley had been at that spot.

Had she gone forward; or had she turned back?

If she had gone on into the swamp, what then?

"It's right I was, as yez see now," said Dennis Malone. "There was a nest out this way, an' it wasn't a mare's nest, ayther. Phwat, now, did young Black an' Crusty mane by actin' loike the bird? If he didn't know av the nest, it was quare, intoirely."

In this opinion the others agreed with him.

The attack upon Fred Henning meant something, and that something was probably an attempt to stop the search for Kate Helmsley.

In this connection the discovery of the locket, showing that she had got as far as the edge of the swamp, was significant.

Had she gone there alone, or had she been brought there by persuasion or force?

The condition of the locket had a little story to tell.

It was not so worn that it had become loosened, but had clearly been broken from its chain, showing that force had been used to detach it; but the force might have been accidental, such as the catching of the trinket on a thorn or twig while she was wandering about.

The most careful examination failed to discover any traces of footprints at the spot where the locket was found, other than those of Saul Stiner and the searching parties.

Since her disappearance there had been at least two heavy rains.

But she had surely been there, and must still be somewhere in the vicinity.

It was not likely that a desperate assault would have been made upon the chief of the searchers, unless there was something that a continued search might expose.

Fred Henning, having got hold of these clews, and having secured the aid of Saul Stiner, was more than ever determined that the search should go on until Kate was found.

Would she be found alive, or dead?

CHAPTER XVII.

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE.

DENNY the Drummer, though actively interested in the search of the missing girl, had found time for other occupations during his stay at Gravelly Bayou.

He had made satisfactory sales of wines and liquors for the house he represented to Leon Delarosse, General Brayham, and several other planters of the neighborhood, and had gained a customer in the tavern-keeper at Martigny.

So much to show that he was not neglecting business.

He had also become a general favorite, having ingratiated himself with all the people at and about Gravelly Bayou, from the highest to the lowest, with the single exception of Paul Delarosse, who surely disliked him intensely.

But he was by no means the only person thus distinguished by the young nabob, and he took pleasure in reciprocating the sentiment.

One of those whose favor the young Irishman had succeeded in gaining was pretty Kitty Tibbles.

As soon as he "struck" the plantation he had noticed the overseer's daughter, and her fresh and piquant style of beauty had captivated him at once.

Kitty was not only not insensible to his admiration, but may be said to have made some girlish efforts to arouse it.

In truth, Zeke Tibbles's daughter was in a peculiar and in some respects unpleasant position there at Gravelly Bayou.

All the young men of the neighborhood were either far above or far below her in social station—either the sons of wealthy planters, or swamp suckers and other varieties of "poor whites."

She could not expect to receive honorable attentions from the planters' sons, nor could she demean herself by mingling with the "trash."

This was one of the misfortunes of being poor but respectable in a slave holding region.

She could not expect to be married there, or to be courted there.

There were cases of seedy widowers or disheartened old bachelors who had married the daughters of their overseers; but they had promptly been placed beyond the pale of good society, if not previously outside of it, and it was the general belief that their wives would have done better to remain unwed.

There was only one way for Zeke Tibbles to get his child out of that rut and give her the chance that a girl ought to have.

He could send her to the North, keeping her at a boarding-school or among her relatives there.

But Kitty was his all, and he hated to part with her.

He was hoping that the time would soon come when he could return to the land of his birth, and settle down among his equals.

All he wanted was to add a little more to his savings, and that little more was continually getting to be yet a little more.

But there was time enough yet, as Kitty was young, and she had not so far appeared to be discontented with the life she was leading there.

When Dennis Malone came within Kitty's range, and it was evident that he admired her, she was naturally attracted to him.

He was neither above her by reason of wealth and position, nor below her because of her poverty and ignorance.

He was a stranger, owning nobody and owned by nobody, free from the trammels by which all the people in the Gravelly Bayou region were bound, and outside of the prejudices and peculiarities of their narrow circles.

If he loved her he might marry her, and there was no reason why she might not marry him, and he seemed to be in all respects a fit associate for her.

Dennis was not slow to perceive the interest he had excited in the damsel's breast, and he laid siege to her with the ardor characteristic of his race.

He sought her out; he acquainted himself with her goings in and her comings forth, her daily occupations and her times and places.

He made a point of meeting her and showing her many little attentions, at the same time flattering her in that open but persuasive style which seems to be peculiar to the Irish, and with which it is not easy to be offended.

Kitty could not help, and did not want to help, showing that she liked his company, and was not indifferent to his attentions.

Indeed, she made opportunities for meeting him, and almost put herself in his way.

Why should she not? Dennis was good enough to be the guest of Leon Delarosse, and he was the friend of Mr. Henning, who was highly esteemed there.

He was a bright and intelligent young man, too, lively and witty, full of talk of people and places, entertaining to all sorts and conditions of men, evidently in a business that supported him nicely, and, withal, a young man who dressed well and knew how to behave properly.

Why should she not encourage his advances? There was but one person to object to him, and that was her father.

Zeke Tibbles might have had a good opinion of Dennis as a man, if he had not been an Irishman.

The overseer had a poor enough opinion of Englishmen; but Irishmen were his abhorrence.

He believed that the children of the Emerald Isle should never have been allowed to enter this country, and the Know Nothing party, which had lately sprung into existence, gained his allegiance at once.

He disliked the appearance of Dennis Malone, and, as for the brogue, that set his teeth on edge whenever he heard it.

When this prejudiced person perceived that the objectionable Irishman was "making up" to his daughter, he thought it right and proper to put a stop to such goings on.

But he was not a hard-hearted father, and Kitty was his only pet; so he warned her gently.

Kitty was inclined to doubt the wisdom of the warning.

"He is Mr. Henning's friend, pa," said she,

"and yew know haow yew like Mr. Henning. He is real nice, tew."

"Haow ken yew call him nice, Kitty, when he is an Irishman, and yew know haow I hate that kind? His brogue is jest horrid."

"Of course he is an Irishman, and has the Irish brogue; but I am a Yankee, and have the Yankee twang."

"That's different. I shall have to speak a leetle plainer, I see. I want yew to keep aout of the way of that Irishman, and I want him tew leave yew alone. If I ketch him foolin' araound yew ag'in, I'll tell him what I think about it."

"Very well, pa," answered Kitty, who doubtless intended to be at least a little more careful.

Zeke Tibbles soon had an opportunity to give Dennis Malone a piece of his mind, and the chance was afforded him by no less important a person than Paul Delarosse.

That young man, having been repulsed almost ignominiously in his advances to the overseer's daughter, had adopted the policy of the dog in the manger.

As he was not to get any favors from her, he determined that nobody else should have any.

He had seen how she and Dennis were drawn together, and of course was anxious to spite the Irishman.

So, when he overheard an appointment between those two, for a meeting after dark, in the grove near the bayou, he resolved to make the most of that information—to become an informer as well as a spy.

Zeke Tibbles had a house of his own—that is to say, a house to himself—a neat and comfortable cottage, at a little distance from the mansion.

Paul Delarosse watched this house until he saw Kitty steal out and shape her course for the bayou.

Then he sought her father, and told him what he had heard and seen.

The overseer despised a spy or a sneak even more than he hated an Irishman; but the matter that was thus brought to his notice required his immediate attention.

It was not likely that he had forgotten the episode which unpleasantly connected young Delarosse with his daughter, and he easily understood the motive of his informant.

He listened somewhat contemptuously, but with interest and rising anger, and was piloted by Paul to the grove near the bayou.

There he found Dennis and Kitty engaged in sweet converse, entirely oblivious of all the world except themselves.

Dennis had his arm around the girl's waist, and under the moonlight was industriously filling her ear with an animated version of the old, old story.

Into this peaceful scene, so pleasant to the two performers who held the stage, Zeke Tibbles broke rudely.

He seized Kitty by the arm, and dragged her away from her lover, speaking angrily and harshly.

"I told yew to keep away from that Irishman, Kitty; but yew not only don't obey me, but even make a pint of meetin' him arter dark, which is a shameful and wicked thing tew dew."

"It was only by accident—" Kitty began to protest; but he cut her off short.

"Don't tell me an untruth, child. I know that yew kem aout here on purpose tew meet him. Come right home, naow, you disobedient girl, and don't let me ever ketch yew as much as lookin' at that bog-trotter ag'in."

Dennis spoke up for himself quickly, dropping his brogue in his excitement.

"You have no right to call me hard names, Mr. Tibbles. It's nothing wrong that I have done, and no more has Kitty. She is a nice girl, a fine girl, and a good girl, and I love her with all me heart and sowl, and mane to marry her, and all we want is your consint."

Zeke Tibbles was astounded. He had not suspected that the affair had made such progress.

"You won't git it!" he exclaimed. "She shouldn't marry yew, if yew were the last man livin'. I would sewner see my darter ho'in' in the cane-fields than hitched to an Irishman."

"And if an Irishman isn't as good as a Yankee, Misther Tibbles, I'm no judge of what's what or who's who. I'm a man of good birth an' breedin', sir, and am gettin' a good income of me own, which I can make bigger when I want to. I won't be set aside by the likes of you, Misther Tibbles, as long as my head's hot."

The overseer, without condescending to make any further reply, took his daughter's arm, and walked away.

Paul Delarosse, who had been enjoying at a little distance from the scene the effect of his dog-in-the-manger policy, made himself scarce as soon as the Irishman was at liberty to attend to him.

"So it's young Black an' Crusty that's been at the bottom av this business," muttered Dennis. "If I don't git ayven wid the spalpeen fur that dirty thrick, me name's not Dennis Malone."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SPECTER OF THE SWAMP.

DENNIS MALONE was not the sort of man who could be put down by even so severe a rebuff as he had received from Zeke Tibbles.

Nor was Kitty the sort of girl who would accept the situation with entire equanimity.

They rebelled against the harsh decree of the paternal Yankee; but their rebellion was under the rose, and their conduct was so discreet and exemplary as to quiet the suspicions of all persons concerned but one.

The suspicions of Paul Delarosse were as alert and venomous as ever.

Kitty met Dennis more than once after the scene in the grove, and both the lovers eluded even the vigilance of the young nabob.

But the Irishman was seeking a chance to "git ayven" with his enemy and sicken him with the task of playing the epy, and he soon found or made the chance.

At the end of a path that led through the shrubbery back of the garden was a rustic summer-house.

The path crossed a small water-course, which at that season of the year was nothing but a muddy ditch, and the only bridge over the ditch was a single plank.

In the hearing of Paul Delarosse Dennis told Fred Henning, who was in his secret, that he had an appointment to meet Kitty Tibbles in the summer-house in the shrubbery after dark that evening, and before the moon rose.

He went down the path at dusk as far as the ditch, and sawed the plank nearly in two.

Wishing to make a sure thing of the catastrophe for which he was preparing, he also stretched a wire across the path at the edge of the ditch, the height of a man's ankle, fastening it well on each side of the path.

As Paul Delarosse, if he came that way at that time, could only get near the summer-house by crossing the plank at the path, it was reasonable for Dennis to suppose that he was about to enjoy the luxury of getting "ayven."

And he did enjoy it.

He concealed himself behind a clump of bushes near by, and watched the working of his trap.

Paul Delarosse, still bent upon playing the part of the dog in the manger, came sneaking down the path through the shrubbery after nightfall, and just as he reached the ditch Dennis had the delight of witnessing the success of both his schemes.

The young nabob tripped at the wire, but luckily fell on the plank, and unfortunately the plank broke.

He tumbled into the ditch, and it was no easy matter for him to extricate himself from the mud and slime.

"Shmall loss if he's kilt," muttered the Irishman.

But Paul finally crawled out on the right side of the ditch, and a very dirty and woebegone object he was.

Dennis repressed his desire to turn loose the yell of exultation that was almost stifling him.

It would be better to let the young nabob guess at the author of his calamity.

Paul did not again attempt to get near the summer house, but hastened to the house of the overseer, who could hardly believe that it was the heir expectant of the Delarosse estate who presented himself there in such a dirty and bedraggled condition.

When Paul explained how he had got into trouble, and told him that his daughter was at that moment keeping an appointment with Dennis Malone at the summer-house in the shrubbery, contempt was mingled with Zeke Tibbles's astonishment.

As a matter of fact, Kitty was at that moment, and had been since sunset, in the kitchen, under her father's eye, in undress uniform, with her sleeves rolled up, hard at work making pastry.

The overseer showed her to Paul to satisfy him, and her bursts of laughter when she saw his condition, and heard the tale he had told were not calculated to restore his peace of mind.

"If folks will go in dirty ways tew dew dirty work, they must kalkilate on gittin' a sheer of dirt," coldly remarked Tibbles, and Paul was glad to sneak away and get himself cleaned.

Dennis Malone, after enjoying the discomfiture of his enemy, had gone to keep his real appointment with Kitty, which was to leave a letter for her where she, and nobody else, would find it.

That letter made arrangements for a secret meeting, and the meeting brought the love affair between Dennis and Kitty to a crisis.

The impulsive Irishman had gained such an ascendancy over the mind of Zeke Tibbles's daughter, that she was ready to consent to anything he might propose that had in it the faintest shadow of reason or propriety.

That is to say, she was desperately in love with him.

She perceived that it was useless to endeavor to overcome her father's prejudices, and was easily persuaded that there was but one course left to secure her happiness.

That course was to run away and get married.

Zeke Tibbles would not have believed that such an idea could find lodgment in Kitty's mind; but fathers know so little about their daughters.

The time fixed for this daring and decisive step was the night succeeding the visit to the place where Kate Helmsley's locket was found.

Kitty, whose discreet behavior had reinstated her in her father's good opinion, and who had gained a point by the young nabob's ignominious failure as a spy, had no difficulty in stealing out and meeting her lover at the time and place appointed.

She was dressed nicely but simply, and carried nothing but a small sachel that held a few of her belongings.

"Oh, Dennis, this is a terrible thing to do," said Kitty, when she had submitted to her lover's customary caress. "It seems so awful."

"There's nothing terrible about it at all, honey," replied Dennis, as he cheered her with another caress. "Don't we want to get married? Thin there's ownly wan way to do it, and it'll sune be over."

"But to run away from pa—"

"We'll rin back to him, alannah, as fast as we rin away, and it won't be long before we ayse his mind, if it can be ayse at all."

"Shall we come straight back, Denny dear?"

"Shtraight as a loine, me love. I've got a tame on the road across the bayou, an' a naygur to dhrove us, an' we'll jist rin up to Vidayly an' git marri'd an' be back here in a jiffy."

Dennis took his darling to the skiff which Paul Delarosse and Fred Henning had previously used, and rowed her across the bayou.

From the point where he landed it was but a little distance to the road, and Dennis was sure that he knew the way, or at least could take the right direction and follow it.

But he had never been out that way at night, and night is apt to change the aspect of the most familiar things, and that particular night at that hour was very dark, and kissing and caressing are not conducive to steadiness of brain, and—in short, he lost his way.

He did not come to the road as soon as he had expected to, and hurried on, after a blind and stumbling fashion, thinking that he would soon reach it; but it happened that he was heading in the wrong direction, and his hurry only took him further out of the way.

Then he became excited, as people will when they are lost, and what was left of his head went sailing off into space.

His excitement was contagious, and Kitty grew hysterical, which made matters worse.

Dennis tried to soothe her, but was obliged to confess that he had not the faintest idea in what direction the road lay, and was quite incapable of finding his way back to the bayou.

"And what will we do naow, Denny dear?" she demanded between her sobs. "Oh, I was sure that somethin' terrible was goin' tew happen tew us for darin' to dew such a wicked thing."

"We'll do well enough, darlint, if we kape our sines about us. There's no wild bastes to ate us in these wuds, an' the road can't be fur away. Wait a bit, now, Kitty dear, till I call the naygur b'ye. I ought to have thought of that before."

He did call, and his voice started up the night birds; but he got no other response to his shouts.

He considered the situation coolly, and took a new departure.

"Come on a bit funder, darlint," he begged. "We'll sune be shtrikin' the road now."

He led Kitty on, almost supporting her, as she was so overcome by excitement and fear and remorse that she could scarcely walk.

But they came to no road.

Instead of that, they saw in front of them and to the left dark pools of water, and the ground began to sink under their feet.

"It's the shwamp!" exclaimed Dennis. "The shwamp, that's full av thim divils av shnakes. We must git away from this, Kitty, phwatever we do."

But Kitty, holding him closely with one arm, was pointing with a trembling hand at an object a little distance from them at the right.

"What's that?" she asked, in an awe-stricken whisper.

Dennis looked as she pointed, and saw, under the giant trees and their trailing banners of moss, a white or grayish figure, that looked like the form of a woman.

"The saints be betune us an' harrum!" he exclaimed. "It's a ghost!"

The specter seemed to start, and glided toward them, stretching out its arms.

Kitty shrieked, and fell in a faint.

CHAPTER XIX.

A FRIENDLY A D FALSE GUIDE.

WHEN Jonas Hexamer stood near Kate Helmsley as the Royal Arch backed away from the snagged Sabine, there was no present cause for the triumphant look which Fred Henning fancied he saw on the man's face.

If he was triumphing over anybody, it must have been by anticipation.

He had not yet spoken to the young lady, nor

had he in any way given her to understand that he felt an interest in her.

But it was he who had caused the captain of the Royal Arch to leave the Sabine a little sooner than he otherwise might have done.

The grief of Kate Helmsley when she saw herself separated from her friend—from the man whom she had expected to be her aid and companion during the voyage—was evident enough to Jonas Hexamer, and he took advantage of it to force his own society upon her.

"You are sorry to leave your friend behind," he said.

Kate gave him a glance of surprise, in which a little displeasure was also visible.

"He is all right," continued Hexamer.

"Nothing the matter with him. There comes a boat that will take him off. But she is bound up the river, and you won't be likely to see him for some time."

The appearance of the man was not prepossessing; but he seemed to mean kindly, and politeness prompted Kate to answer him.

"Mr. Henning went below to get my sachel," said she, "and that is how he got left."

"Mr. Henning? I know him. He is well known on the river. I know you, too, miss; that is, I know about you."

"Indeed, sir?" replied Kate, the least bit alarmed.

"Yes, ma'am. I know that your name is Kate Helmsley, and that you are from Tennessee, and that you are going to Mrs. Brenner's, near Martigny. I came from those parts, you see, and heard about you there, and saw your name on the Sabine's register, and that is how I happened to know you."

Kate made no answer.

Evidently the man was taking advantage of the calamity to introduce himself to her; but, as he was a neighbor of Mrs. Brenner's, there was nothing objectionable in that.

He went on to complete the introduction.

"My name is Hexamer, Miss Helmsley—Jonas Hexamer, of Martigny. I know everybody about there, and everybody knows me. Mrs. Brenner was speaking to me about you a while ago. I believe that you are sorter related to her."

"Distantly related, sir."

"Mighty nice old lady is Mrs. Brenner. One of the best families in that part of the country. You will find it very pleasant, living with her. I suppose you don't know anything about the place or the people—do you?"

"Very little, if anything."

"So you will need somebody to kinder pilot you and get you safe on the way to Mrs. Brenner's, and I will be glad to help you in that way, if you care to have me. Now, when you get off at Martigny—"

"Martigny is not the place," interrupted Kate. "I believe I am to land at Vidalia."

"That so? There must be some mistake. You can get there from Vidalia, of course; but it is the longest and hardest way. This boat has no landing to make at Vidalia, but is bound to stop at Martigny, and from there I can send you on by a good conveyance, if we get in early enough. If not, there is a good hotel at Martigny, where I always stop when I am in town, and they will take good care of you for Mrs. Brenner's sake. By all means, Miss Helmsley, Martigny is your best chance."

Kate suffered herself to be persuaded.

Mr. Jonas Hexamer, though not at all attractive, spoke fairly, and doubtless meant well, and seemed to be acquainted among the people whom she was going to visit.

It was true, as he had said, that she needed somebody to pilot her, and there was a more serious consideration yet—she had no money, and it is a very embarrassing thing, to say the least of it, to find oneself in a strange place without money.

All her available funds were in the sachel which Fred Henning had returned to get for her, and just then they were entirely unavailable.

At Vidalia she would be quite unknown, and that would be awkward; but at Martigny Mr. Hexamer might at least accredit her to the hotel-keeper, and Mrs. Brenner's name would do the rest.

So she suffered the Royal Arch to steam past Vidalia, and when a landing was made at Martigny she went ashore with Jonas Hexamer—"dry so," as one of the natives might have expressed it.

He congratulated her upon the fact that they had reached Martigny in the morning, so that she would have plenty of time to get to Mrs. Brenner's before night set in.

This was gratifying news to Kate, who began to feel as if she had nearly come to the end of her trouble, and was well disposed toward the man who had at least smoothed away some of her difficulties.

Jonas Hexamer led her at once to the "hotel" he had spoken of, which proved to be a small but comfortable tavern, and there he easily established his claim to consideration.

As the tavern-keeper received him cordially, like an old acquaintance, it was evident that he was well thought of, at least in that quarter.

He introduced Miss Helmsley, told the story

of the steamboat disaster briefly, and explained that the young lady wanted a conveyance as soon as possible to take her on to Mrs. Brenner's.

"The best you have got, Mr. Biggs," said he, "as Miss Helmsley won't want to go in a rattle-trap, even if she has been shipwrecked."

This was liberal; but of course she would not be indebted to Mr. Hexamer for the turnout, as the bill would be paid by Mrs. Brenner.

A good horse was soon put to a nice buggy; but the tavern-keeper explained with regrets that he had nobody but a negro boy to drive, as his driver was ill with a fever, and he was almost afraid to trust the boy.

"If Miss Helmsley will allow me," said Jonas Hexamer, "I will drive her out to Mrs. Brenner's. I have to go near there, and of course I know the way."

Kate was unwilling to put him to so much trouble; but he protested that it would be an accommodation to him, rather than a trouble, and she consented.

Why should she not?

He was apparently a responsible man, well known and respected, and she would feel much safer under his protection than in the company of a negro boy who was admitted to be unreliable.

The journey was rather pleasant at first, as the road was a good one, leading past nice houses and fine plantations, and Kate enjoyed the balmy air and the strangely beautiful scenery.

But, before they had traveled many miles, they turned off from the main road into one that was much rougher and little traveled.

There were no more nice houses or fine plantations to be seen, as they rode through a gloomy forest, where the giant branches of the great trees, with their heavy draperies of gray moss, made a weird and somber scene.

On they went, the road growing worse, and the forest deeper and darker, with no sign of a clearing, or even a glade, and the sunlight itself was saddening as it struggled through the dense masses of foliage.

Still they went on, until the horse's feet began to splash in swampy pools, and the wheels of the buggy to sink in the moist turf.

"I hope we have not much further to go," said Kate with a shudder.

"We are nearly there," cheerily answered Hexamer.

"Mercy on us! Does Mrs. Brenner live in a swamp?"

"Not quite so bad as that; but we have to go through a swamp to get there. You will soon get used to that sort of thing down here."

It was not a pleasant thing to get used to; but there was no help for it just then.

Finally the buggy was stopped where further progress was manifestly impossible.

Beyond the horse's head Kate could see nothing but a stretch of dark and shining water.

On each side were the great trees of a swamp, funereal and draped with moss, with glistening pools and dark hummocks between the trunks.

Jonas Hexamer alighted from the buggy, and hitched the horse, though the animal was not likely to stir from his tracks in that position.

"What are we going to do now?" anxiously inquired the young lady.

Hexamer hesitated a little before answering.

"The fact is," said he, "that there is a difficulty I hadn't looked for. The river has been rising lately."

If Fred Henning had been there, he would have promptly told the man that he lied.

"The river has been rising, and that backs up the bayous and fills the swamps, so that the road this way is a little mixed. But there is no real trouble, and you will soon be safe. I will call one of Mrs. Brenner's niggers, who will take you over easy enough."

He put a whistle to his lips, and sounded a peculiar call.

Then he waited, while Kate sat in the buggy, wondering and uneasy, but quite incapable of doing anything to extricate herself from that strange situation.

She almost shrieked when a big and burly negro suddenly showed himself at the side of the horse.

He was very black, very ugly, and attired only in a few tattered rags.

"What do you mean by this, Marius?" angrily demanded Hexamer. "Does your mistress allow you to go about in that kind of clothes?"

The negro only grinned hideously, showing a formidable set of white teeth.

"Well, I suppose it can't be helped. As you are here, we will have to take you as you are. This young lady is Miss Helmsley, who is going to Mrs. Brenner's, and I want you to carry her across this bit of water."

"All right, sah," answered Marius, as he stepped up to the buggy, and reached out his long arms.

Kate drew back, shuddering.

"I can easily get out," she said. "Where is the boat?"

"There ain't any boat," replied Hexamer, a little gruffly. "The water is too shallow for a boat; but it is as wet as any other water."

There is only a little stretch of it, though, and this man will carry you across in a few minutes."

"Dear me! This is very unpleasant. I don't like it at all, Mr. Hexamer. I wish I had stopped at Vidalia."

"But you didn't stop there. You are here now, and there is only one way to get across."

"I would rather wade."

"Oh, you couldn't do that. It don't amount to anything. Marius will have you over there in a jiffy, and then you will be safe on solid ground, and right at the house, almost."

There was no help for it, and Kate began to descend from the buggy.

As she did so, the ugly negro seized her in his long arms, lifting her as easily as he could have carried an infant, and bore her away.

She did not attempt to struggle or to shriek. There would have been no use in that, and she had plenty of nerve and pluck.

Marius dashed at once into the water, but picked his way carefully, as if it was necessary to be very particular where he planted his feet, and Jonas Hexamer followed in his tracks.

One glance at her surroundings was sufficient for Kate Helmsley.

Then she closed her eyes and awaited the end of the unpleasantness.

The agony—at least, that phase of the agony—was soon over.

Kate was soon unloaded by the big negro and was placed upon her feet on the ground.

What she saw there was not calculated to restore her equanimity or to allay her apprehensions.

CHAPTER XX.

AMONG THE MOCCASINS.

It was to the home of the tribe of the Moccasins that Kate Helmsley had been brought—the hiding-place of the refugee negroes and alien white men.

She was soon to discover this fact, and to realize the baseness of the man who had brought her there.

As she glanced around she perceived that she was standing on an island, as it seemed to be, in the middle of a swamp lagoon.

The ground was manifestly solid; but the surroundings were horrible.

Large trees and heavy undergrowth covered the island, with the exception of a small portion, on which were situated two huts, much poorer and shabbier and dirtier and meaner than any cabins Kate had ever seen in negro quarters.

They did not look in the least like negro quarters, either, and there was no sign of a house, nor was there anything like a plantation visible.

Kate's lips closed resolutely, and her eyes snapped—a sure sign that she had made up her mind to the worst.

The suspicions which she had been nursing before the buggy reached the swamp were growing rapidly.

If Mrs. Brenner housed her servants in such a place and in such a manner, what sort of a woman must she be?

Clearly there was something wrong somewhere.

But what was it? and whose was the fault? That was what she must find out.

Looking around, she saw Jonas Hexamer standing near her, just behind the big negro, and to him she addressed herself.

"What place is this, sir? I don't understand it at all. Where is Mrs. Brenner's house?"

"It is all right," he doggedly answered. "You needn't be afraid."

"I am not afraid. If you think I am frightened, you are mistaken in me. Show me Mrs. Brenner's house, if you can."

"Come right along, ma'am. I will show you the way."

He walked to the smallest and poorest of the huts, slowly followed by Kate, opened the rude door, and stepped in, as if expecting her to do likewise.

She did not enter.

One glance at the dark and filthy interior of the hovel was enough for her.

"Come right in," said Hexamer.

"I will not," sturdily replied Kate. "Why should I go into such a place as that? Is this the way you take me to Mrs. Brenner's?"

Hexamer said nothing more.

Her answer came from another quarter.

The big negro who was coming up behind her gave her a push, and she almost fell into the hovel through the open doorway.

She understood her position then.

She was nowhere near Mrs. Brenner's pleasant and hospitable home, and was not likely to get there.

Jonas Hexamer had played her false from the beginning of his acquaintance with her, and his course had been a continual deception.

He had deceived her to that remote and horrible spot for purposes of his own.

What were his purposes?

Whatever they were, she would face them boldly and oppose them resolutely.

His much was revealed to her in a twinkling

by the rude push that sent her headlong into the hovel.

As soon as she had made sure of her footing, and had straightened herself up, she took a view of her surroundings.

The door of the cabin had been instantly closed, and the interior was not easily visible, as it was lighted only by a hole at one end; but her eyes soon became accustomed to the gloom, and her keen sight speedily took in the details.

The hut was a poor copy of the worst style of negro cabins.

Opposite the door was a broad fireplace with a clay hearth, on which a few "chunks" of wood were smoldering, flanked by some primitive cooking utensils. At one end was a bedstead, if it deserved the name, made of croched sticks and poles, and at the other end was a "puncheon" table of the rudest sort. There was nothing else that could be called furniture, unless a "puncheon" bench and a few ragged blankets could be so catalogued.

On the pile of blankets, at one end of the hearth, squatted a negro woman.

As she sat in the range of the hole that admitted the light, Kate could see that she was old and wrinkled, looking more like a mummy than a living human being.

At all events, it was a consolation to the deceived young lady to know that she was not alone there with Jonas Hexamer.

He stood at a little distance from her, with his head drooped, a frown on his face, and a half-defiant, half-sneering expression, that did not add to his attractiveness.

He started, as if he had been struck, when Kate turned upon him and spoke to him sharply.

"Now, sir," she demanded, "I want to know what this means. I can easily judge that I am not at Mrs. Brenner's house, nor anywhere near it. I know well enough that you have lied to me and deceived me in the basest and most shameful manner. Now I want to know what you mean by it."

"Sit down, and I will tell you," he briefly answered.

Kate calmly seated herself on the bench, facing him as he stood near her.

"I have brought you here in the way of business," said he.

"What business, sir? It must be something hateful to have begun in this way."

"You shall have it short and straight, Miss Helmsley. No more crookedness now, as it ain't needed. I have got you now just where I want you. You're not near Mrs. Brenner's, and not likely to go there for awhile. I have brought you here because I want you to marry a friend of mine. There you have it, cut right off."

Was that the truth? It might have been worse. Kate sighed a quick sigh of relief.

"I have heard it said, sir," she remarked, "that a man is his own best friend. I hope that you are not the friend you speak of."

"No. You are safe there, young lady. The friend I speak of is a young man. Some folks consider him good-looking, and he is well educated, and has plenty of style, and is heir to one of the best estates in Louisiana."

Kate opened her eyes in amazement.

This was a very peculiar wooing, to say the least of it, and the whole affair was far beyond her comprehension.

"Has he ever seen me?" she asked.

"Not yet, and I doubt if he will see you until you are ready to marry him."

"Why should he want to marry me, if he knows nothing about me?"

"He knows enough about you to be sure that you are the woman he wants for a wife."

The situation struck Kate just then as being more comical than tragical, and she smiled as she calmly discussed it with her false guide.

"He must have some reason for such a very peculiar wish," said she.

"He has a good enough reason—a reason that satisfies him and me."

"Am I not to be consulted in the matter?"

"You are consulted. I have told you all about it."

"But you haven't got my consent. Suppose I refuse to give it."

"I won't suppose anything of the kind."

"But I do refuse," declared Kate.

"Well, you won't keep on refusing."

"Suppose I do."

"Then you will stay right here until you come to your senses, and do what I want you to do. There's no use in talking about it any more. I have said all I have to say. You understand the business now, and know what you have to expect. I must go and take that buggy back to Martigny."

"You are going away, then?"

"Yes."

"That is one thing to be thankful for. The sooner you go the better I will be pleased."

"Take good care of this young lady, Dinah," said Hexamer to the old negro woman.

"Get her something to eat, and make her as comfortable as you can."

Then he hastily left the cabin.

Kate turned her attention to the old woman, who was rising from her couch of ragged blankets.

When she got on her feet she seemed to have gained in height and breadth.

She laughed, chuckling and shaking like Santa Claus in the poem, as she waddled over to where Kate was seated.

"Nice man, dat," she muttered. "Pow'ful nice man, dat. He'd look well at de end ob a rope. Dar's whar he'd look well."

Kate stared at her, wondering what she meant by that rigmarole.

The old woman came to her, and touched her face with a finger like a blackbird's claw.

"Who's you, honey? Whar'd you come frum? Dar's somefin' in yo' face dat 'minds me uv somebody. Who is you, anyhow?"

"My name is Kate Helmsley, and I am from Tennessee."

"Helmsley—yes, dat's de name. Dey cain't fool ole Dinah much. Miss Susie marri'd a Tennessee man, an' his name was Helmsley."

"What Miss Susie?" inquired Kate.

"Miss Susie Brenner—my ole missus's darter."

"She was my mother."

"I knowed it. Dey cain't fool ole Dinah. I'se pow'ful glad to find yer, honey."

CHAPTER XXI.

A COMBAT OF WILD BEASTS.

As Kate Helmsley rose from her seat, the old negro woman embraced her, weeping as she took the girl in her arms.

"Will you be my friend, then, because you knew my mother?" asked Kate.

"You kin jess be shuah ob dat, honey. I'se yo' frien' all froo, wid ebry bit ob de life dat's leff in me. I was raised in yo' fambly, chile, an' 'longed to yo' grand-dad."

"How do you happen to be here, then?"

"I runned away long ago. We'se all run-away niggahs heah; but I'se gwine to truss you not to tell on us. Ole Jim Brenner was a mighty hard man—crule to de brack folks an' to ebryt'ing on de place; but his wife, my missus, was jess as good as he was bad, an' Miss Susie, yo' mudder, was a bo'n angel fur sweetness."

"Mars'r Jim used to hab de fearfulest kind ob tantrums, an' w'en de fits come on he'd jess as quick kill a body as eat. He got mad at me once, an' swo' he'd whip me to deff. He'd ha' done it, too, ef he'd got started in."

"But Miss Susie up an' tuck my part, an' tole him he'd hab to kill her fust. He hit her an' orful blow, an' she fainted. W'en he saw w'ot he'd done he was all bruck up, an' he leff me alone. But I was skeered, an' runned away, soon's I got a chance, an' jined de Moccasins."

"What are the Moccasins, Aunt Dinah?" asked Kate.

"We'se de Moccasins, honey. We'se a tribe ob runaway niggahs, mixed wid a bit ob white trash, an' we'se a pow'ful hard set, too. But you musn't tell on us, 'case we wouldn't be no good to nobody 'f we was kotched, an' den I couldn't help yo' outen dis yar scrape."

"Can you help me, then, Auntie?"

"Spects I kin, chile."

"And will you do it?"

"Co'se I will 'f I kin. D'yo' reckon I wouldn't do all I could fur Miss Susie's darter?"

"Bless you, Aunt Dinah! I know that I need help. You may be sure that I will be grateful to you, and that I will prove my gratitude if I can. That man who brought me here—is he one of the Moccasins?"

"No, chile. He don't 'long to us; but he t'inks we 'long to him. Some ob us do, I reckon—some ob de men folks, w'ot he's paid to look arter you; but he didn't gib ole Dinah nuffin'."

"I will give you something, Dinah. The steamboat on which I was coming down the river sunk—I will tell you all about that after a while—and I lost all my money and jewelry. But I have this chain and locket left."

Kate put her hand to her neck to take off the chain she wore, but discovered, somewhat to her dismay, that the locket was no longer there.

"The locket is gone," she said. "I must have lost it in the woods, or when I was carried over here. But the chain is heavy, and all gold. Take it, Dinah, and when I get free I can pay you well for all you do for me."

The old woman concealed the chain among the rags that formed her attire.

"I'se gwine ter keep dat, honey," said she—"not fur myself, but beca'se I mought want ter gib it ter somebody. I wouldn't take so much's a picayune frum Miss Susie's darter, 'less I could use it to help her. But dis is a mighty ticklish business, Miss Kate. I cain't neber git yo' way frum yar widout somebody ter help me, an' I'll hab to b'ar down on one ob dem he niggahs an' hitch him inter de traces somehow. Dat's gwine ter take time, as I muss w'ok sly an' keerful, an' you'll hab to go slow, honey, an' take t'ings as easy as yo' kin."

As Kate was declaring that she would be guided in all things by Dinah, the old woman's quick ear caught the sound of steps outside.

"Dat's Jule," said she. "Don't say nuffin' 'bout yer business to her, honey—nuffin' to nobody but me."

A young mulatto woman came into the cabin, and Dinah hastened to mend the fire and prepare something to eat.

Kate Helmsley was made as comfortable as possible in the cabin, old Dinah doing all she could to make the girl's life there at least endurable.

The mulatto woman also took a lively interest in her, and she had reason to believe that they were both her friends, though Dinah was the only one in whom she fully trusted.

She had nothing to do with the men, who were, as a rule, rigorously excluded from the hovel which she occupied with the women.

But she was occasionally permitted, under the escort of Dinah or Jule, to walk about the swamp island, and then she saw enough of the black and white Moccasins to perceive that they lacked little of being savages.

They had no visible occupations, and their existence seemed to be so precarious, as well as so brutal, that it might well be doubted whether they had gained anything by the sort of freedom they had acquired.

When they were not foraging in the woods and swamps or about the plantations, they passed the time mainly in sleeping, or in eating and drinking when they had anything to eat and drink.

They did not always have something to eat and drink, even where the necessities of life were so easy to get, as they were an improvident set, living from hand to mouth, making no provision for the morrow, and gorging themselves when they chanced to get anything.

Sometimes they got liquor, or made a rude and fiery rum of the refuse of molasses barrels and sugar hogsheads.

Then they were demons, and the women tried to keep out of their way, shutting themselves up in the smaller hut, barricading the entrances as well as they could, and trembling as they listened to the oaths and yells that came from the orgie outside.

On one occasion a drunken black got in among them before they were aware of any trouble of that sort.

This was no other than Marius, the big and ugly brute who had carried Kate over to the island.

He had contrived to steal some liquor on one of his prowling excursions, and had started a private debauch of his own, of which no other person on the island knew anything until he had finished the stuff.

Then he started out on the war-path, his brutal instinct leading him at once to the hut in which the women were eating their evening meal.

His condition was evident as soon as he stepped inside, and they shrunk from him in fear and horror.

His hideous face, scarred and seamed and pitted, was uglier than ever when his blood was inflamed by liquor, and his eyes glared like those of a wild beast.

The mulatto woman recovered herself quickly, and advanced upon him.

"Wot yo' want yar, yo' big brack hound?" she demanded. "Git out o' dis, now, mighty sudden!"

"Marius wants de wite gal," he answered, fastening his eyes upon Kate as she shrunk into a corner.

"Yo' cain't git her, den! Cl'ar out, I say!"

The black fiend dashed her away, and strode toward the corner in which Kate Helmsley lay cowered.

But Dinah rose up before him.

The old woman seemed almost to renew her youth as she stood there in defense of "Miss Susie's" child.

She was not weaponless.

She had raised and cocked a large, old-fashioned horse-pistol, which she leveled at the big brute.

"G'way frum yar, you Marius!" she shouted. "Dis t'ing is loaded, an' I'se bound to shute!"

The infuriated negro gave no heed to her threat, but pushed forward toward Kate.

Dinah pulled the trigger of the ancient weapon, and it was fired with a report like that of a small cannon.

Blood spurted from the black man's side; but this only angered him, and he pressed forward, knocking old Dinah down in his mad rush.

Kate shrieked for help, and help was at hand.

Another black man had entered the hut—a young negro, half-naked as Marius was, but far more comely and less vicious to look at.

Yet he was by no means a bad match for Marius, frantic as the big negro was with rum and passion.

What he lacked in weight he made up in agility, in the strength of his loins, and in the muscles and suppleness of his limbs.

He sprang forward like a panther, and the force of his leap sent him violently against Marius, knocking the big fellow out of his course and against the wall of the cabin.

Marius drew himself together with a howl like that of a wild beast, and hurled himself upon this unexpected opponent.

His foe was ready for him and they grappled as two wild-cats might grapple.

Then the cabin was hideous with their black forms as they rolled over and over and here and there, writhing, twisting and struggling,

their labored breathing and savage cries adding horror to the scene.

The young fellow was the more active of the two, and had the advantage of a clear head.

But Marius was the heavier, and his frenzy made his strength something terrible.

Yet the wound that Dinah's shot had inflicted was no mere scratch, and the loss of blood was telling on him.

The three women squeezed themselves into corners, and found it no easy task to keep out of the way of the combatants, whose struggles carried them all over the cabin, smashing and splintering the little furniture it contained.

At last the young negro succeeded in throwing Marius upon the hearth and pushing him into the fireplace.

When the live coals burned into his flesh he yelled with agony and sprang to his feet as if he had been shot upward, throwing his antagonist forcibly from him and on the earthen floor of the hut.

The next instant he had leaped upon him there, and was strangling him with both hands.

It seemed as if all was up with the young fellow; but he was neither dead nor subdued.

In another instant they were again rolling over together, an almost indistinguishable mass of black bodies and limbs.

But there was one thing in the mass that was fearfully visible.

It was the bright blade of a knife in the hand of the younger man, which flashed in the darkness as it rose and fell, and the sickening sound of its blows was plainly audible as it cut into the black flesh of Marius.

This new assault upon his life was more than he could endure.

His limbs relaxed, his big frame quivered, and at last he lay motionless on the floor, while his antagonist stood over him, holding the dripping knife, panting from his exertions, and covered with blood and dirt.

Jule then ventured to creep forward to see the end of the desperate struggle.

Dinah went to the assistance of Kate Helmsley, who had fainted in a corner.

CHAPTER XXII.

KATE HELMSLEY'S ESCAPE.

ALTHOUGH Jonas Hexamer did not happen to be on the swamp island at the time of the affray that resulted in the death of Marius, he was frequently there before and after that event.

Indeed, the greater part of his time was passed there.

He had not inflicted his society upon Kate Helmsley, and had not annoyed her beyond what might have seemed to him to be necessary.

His communications with her had been, as it seemed, only to see that she was made as comfortable as she could be under the circumstances, and to assure her of the inflexibility of his purpose of marrying her to the young man of whom he had spoken.

Kate was really thankful to him for the consideration he showed her, and in time began to regard his matrimonial project as a joke, rather than a serious affair.

It must be a joke, as it progressed no nearer to its realization as the days went by, and as she was decidedly of the opinion that she could not be made a wife against her will.

There was no doubt, however, that she could be confined to that island and kept from her friends against her will.

Of this she had an abundance of practical proof, much to her displeasure and disgust.

That was bad enough; but to her it seemed to be the worst she had to bear or expect.

Naturally she thought of Fred Henning, and wondered what had become of him.

Had he taken possession of her sachel of valuables, and left her to her fate?

Not he!

Never for the faintest fraction of a second did she give harbor to the idea that he might have deserted her.

She relied on him with a supreme confidence, never doubting that as soon as possible he would follow her, anxious to discover and rescue her.

It was not a question of his willingness but of his ability.

She knew that she was well hid in that remote and inaccessible swamp, and that more than ordinary ability, accompanied by unusual luck, would be required to disclose the secret of her hiding-place.

Fred Henning had at least ordinary ability and was by no means unlucky, and of course he would do his best to find her.

She relied on him implicitly, and this it was that kept her hope alive when the clouds about her were the darkest and the thickest.

After the raid of the big negro crazed by liquor, Kate changed in feeling, if not in opinion, on some of these points.

That terrible scene had shattered her, making her nervous, easily frightened, and unusually apprehensive.

Marius was dead and buried, and the men, as well as the women, were glad that he was out

of the way, as he had been feared among the Moccasins far more than he had been loved, and it was not likely that the bad example he had set would soon find an imitator.

But it was useless for Dinah to urge these facts upon Kate, or to endeavor to soothe or encourage her.

The girl had become nervously timid, and she could not help it.

"I can't stand this much longer, Dinah," said she. "I am continually afraid that something terrible will happen. If I am ever to leave this place, I must get away soon."

"Yes, honey, an' so yer shell," sympathetically answered the old woman. "Ise done got de trick e'ena'most fixed up."

Jonas Hexamer, also, was considerably exercised in his mind by the insane attempt of the big negro.

Kate's danger on that occasion had inspired him with the fear of losing her, and her loss at that time would have spoiled his most cherished plan.

Marius was dead and gone; but there were others who were able to be about as vicious as he had been, and who could tell when they might break out?

He readily opened his mind to Kate on this subject, meeting more than half-way the complaint she had to make.

"Yes, young lady, you are quite right about that," said he. "It won't do for you to stay here any longer. I don't wonder at your being scared. I was pretty badly worried about that affair, myself, and I am going to take you away."

"You mean to set me free, then?" joyfully exclaimed Kate. "Am I to get back to my friends?"

"Better than that. I am going to marry you to the nice young man I spoke of—a fine young man, rich, of good family, and just what you want for a husband."

"But it happens that I do not want anything of the kind. Besides, I have never seen him."

"That don't matter."

"It matters to me. And he has never seen me."

"He will see you when he marries you. That will be soon enough. I have been letting this thing run on, young lady, hoping that you would see the reasonableness of what I want you to do, and I didn't care to hurry you. But now I must bring it to a point, as I may say, and settle it off-hand. I have got everything arranged, and to-morrow night I will take you to a place where you will meet the young gentleman, and there you will be married."

"So you have arranged everything to suit you?" remarked Kate. "If that is the case, there is nothing left for me to say."

"Just so. I suppose you ain't very well off for clothes?"

"It would be strange if I were. When you brought me here I had nothing but what I was wearing, and there has been no chance to get anything since then."

"You have managed to take mighty good care of them, though, and they will do to get married in. After that you shall have the best that money can buy. It is all settled now, and to-morrow night I will come for you."

Kate made no further protest or reply.

She knew what she had to expect, and also knew what she had to guard against.

It is reasonable to suppose that she considered herself able to make trouble for any person who would attempt to marry her against her will.

She unfolded Hexamer's intentions to Dinah, and asked the old woman if she thought she could guess who the "nice young man" was to whom Hexamer meant to marry her.

"Spec's I kin, honey. Dis ole nigga mought make a pow'ful good guess. But dar's no use talkin'. Let him go 'long. He ain't g'wine to marry you, an' de fust t'ing he knows he may slip up an' bu't hisself."

"Are you going to get me away from here, then, you dear old Dinah?"

"Co'se I am, honey. You's been yar long enough. Ole Jonas has got t'ings fixed to suit him, an' I'se got t'ings fixed to suit *me*. You know Jim?"

"Who had the fight with Marius?" answered Kate with a shudder.

"Yes. Dat's my son—my baby boy. He got yo' chain, too, an' he must 'arn it. To-morrow night Jim will kerry you across de watah, an' set you on de groun' ober dar. But he cain't take you far, 'case he's got to be back yar."

"I don't care for that, auntie. If I can only get away from here, it is nothing to me if I am left alone in the woods. I can make my way somewhere."

"You comes o' good stock, Miss Kate, an' ain't afeard o' nothin'. Truss my Jim to gib yer a good start."

Kate trusted Dinah, and trusted Jim, and neither of them disappointed her expectations.

Her only difficulty was the fear that Jonas Hexamer might come for her before she could get away.

But Jim and his mother managed that for her,

and the stout young negro carried her across the water as soon as darkness had settled down upon the swamp, taking a direction different from that by which Hexamer had always arrived.

When she was set down upon ground which, if not entirely solid, might at least be considered as a part of the main land, her joy was so great that she burst into tears, and black Jim was quite overcome by her emotion.

"Don't take on so, missy," he begged. "Come right along wid me, an' step keerful, 'case dey's lots o' holes an' mushy places 'bout yar."

He led her gently but firmly a little further on, until they were quite out of sight of the island and the lagoon.

"You kin git along now, missy, if you ain't afeard," said he. "Dar ain't nuffin' to be skeered at, an' all you's got to do is to walk straight along dat way, lookin' neider to de right nor to de leff, an' you's shuah to strike de road to'able soon, an' den you's all right. I mus' run right away now, so's to be ober dar w'en de white man shows up."

Before she could speak her thanks he vanished, as if he were a piece of the darkness.

The directions which he had given Kate seemed to be easy enough, and she doubtless supposed that she would have no difficulty in following them.

It was only necessary to walk forward fearlessly, and to keep a given course.

But when she found herself alone the darkness overwhelmed her, and the somber shadows of the swamp settled upon her heart.

She had said that she would be satisfied to be left alone in the forest; but the realization of that position was terrible.

A few steps she made in the direction that had been pointed out to her, and then she halted, staring about irresolutely.

Already she was afraid that she had missed the course she was to take.

Then she heard voices, and, of course, they startled her.

Could it be that Jonas Hexamer was just then coming to the island with a comrade?

If so, would they not be sure to find her and capture her?

No; it was not Hexamer.

She was sure that one of the voices was that of a woman, and in the other she recognized the brogue of an Irishman.

Kate looked in the direction of the sounds, and there she saw them.

Yes; there were two of them—a man and a woman, and the woman was pointing toward her.

What could they be doing there, afar in the forest at night, and at the edge of that fearful swamp?

She did not stop to argue that question.

It was enough that they were human beings, and of course they would befriend her in her distress.

With a joyful cry she advanced toward them, holding out her hands.

The woman shrieked, and dropped helplessly upon the ground.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"'Twas Kitty as found her."

"THEY take me for a ghost," muttered Kate, as she stopped short.

There could be no question of that, as the man was on his knees by the side of his companion, wildly waving his hands toward her, and jabbering a strange mixture of prayers and curses.

Kate was obliged to admit that she might well be mistaken for a ghost.

Her dress, the same she had worn on the Sabine, was nearly white, and had been badly stained by travel and use; but it was fortunately of material that would wash, and Dinah's care had kept her presentable.

It was quite natural that her light dress should produce a queer effect upon people who suddenly caught sight of her after dark in that dismal locality.

But she knew that she was not a ghost, and that she could not afford to lose any chances.

"It is all right," she exclaimed, as she again hastened forward. "I am not a ghost. I am only a woman, and in trouble."

Her voice restored Dennis Malone to his senses at once.

Although not without his superstitions, he was usually a brave and cool-headed young man, and it was Kitty's terror that had been contagious and upset him for the moment.

"Is it alive yez are, thin?" cried Dennis as he jumped to his feet. "Faix an' I'm glad to hear that same, an' to have it from yer own lips, so I'm sure it's no lie. Plaze to come right on, mim, an' help me wid this darlint, because I'm afraid she's kilt intirely."

Kate Helmsley hastened to him, and took Kitty's head in her arms.

"What a pretty girl!" she exclaimed. "She has fainted; but we will soon bring her out of that."

And so they did, and Kitty smiled when she opened her eyes and saw Kate's sweet face bending over her.

"It wasn't a ghost at all, at all, Kitty dear,"

said Dennis. "It was jist this shwate young leddy; but who w'd iver have looked to find an angel out here—barrin' yerself, me darlint?"

Kitty had got up, and was staring at Kate with wonder and admiration.

"But who air yew, miss?" she demanded. "And haow did yew ever get lost aout here?"

"I have been very unfortunate," answered Kate. "I have just escaped from the power of a man who had promised to take me to my friends. Instead of doing so, he captured me, and has kept me concealed for a long time in a horrible place in the swamp. This may sound like a strange story to you; but—"

"It's her!" shouted Dennis, jumping up and clapping his hands.

"What do you mean, sir?" inquired Kate, as if she thought he had gone crazy.

"It's her, Kitty dear. We've made a blessid find this time—the saints be praised!—and it'll be the buildin' av us up, as sure as yer sbtandin' there."

"What do you mean, Dennis?"

"Is it a Yankee yez are, an' no good at guessin'? Sure, Kitty, an' this is the young leddy that Fred Henning an' all the rest av us has been lookin' for day an' night this long time. It's Miss Helmsley!"

"Haow smart yew air!" exclaimed Kitty. "I dew believe yew're right."

"My name is Helmsley—there is no doubt of that," said the young lady. "You speak of Mr. Henning. Has he, then, been looking for me?"

"I should say lookin'," responded Dennis. "There's not a fut of ground in these parts but phwat he's been over, ixceptin', av course, the very spot where they'd hid yez."

"Is he near here now?"

"Sure an' it's not far, mim. He's jist over at Gravelly Bayou, at Mister Delarosse's place, where we kem from a bit ago, an' where we're goin' back to as fast as our feet 'll take us."

This was easier to say than to do; but the Irishman had better luck in returning to Gravelly Bayou than in getting away from there.

Perhaps the double responsibility braced him up; or it may have been that he was no longer distracted by the duty of caressing Kitty.

He chose his course with but little hesitation, and led the way boldly, followed by the two girls hand in hand.

Sooner than he could have expected he struck the road that led to the bayou, and then he knew where he was.

It was not a difficult task to find the skiff, which was concealed in the bushes where he had left it.

When he invited the girls to enter it, Kitty was struck by a spasm of fear at the thought of her return to her father.

"He will jest scalp me, Dennis," said she. "He will want to know what I've been dewin' aout in the woods with yew at this time o' night, an' oh! what shall I tell him?"

"What were you doin'?" inquired Kate Helmsley. "Tell me all about it, and perhaps I can suggest something."

"We was jist runnin' away to git marri'd," answered Dennis, "an' we got lost in the wuds. But there's nothin' to be frightened at, Kitty, dear. It's the best thing that could ha' happened to us, and, as I told yez a bit ago, it'll be the buildin' av us up. Jist I've me alone to put the comether on the ould gentleman, an' niver fear but phwat I'll shwayten him."

"But what will you say, Dennis?"

"Kape a shiff upper lip, me darlint, an' I've it all to me, an' I'll bring it out as straight as a gun-bar'l."

When they reached the Gravelly Bayou mansion, nearly all the inmates were gathered on the broad front porch.

Leon Delarosse was there, with General Brayham and his wife, Fred Henning and Arthur Helmsley; but Paul Delarosse was not visible in the group.

Kitty Tibbles had of course been missed by her father; but he had made no disturbance about it.

Connecting her disappearance with that of Dennis Malone, he was Yankee enough to make a good guess at what had become of her, and he had organized a quiet search on his own account, which had thus far been productive of no results.

It was doubtless surprising to the group on the porch to see three persons—a man and two women—approaching the house from the direction of the bayou.

Dennis and Kitty they might guess at; but who could the third woman be?

The Irishman settled the question for them in a characteristic and sensational style, throwing up his hat, and giving throat to a hearty hail.

"Whirrool!" he shouted. "Whoop! Whirrool! W've found her, me b'yes! We've got Miss Helmsley! 'Twas Kitty as found her, an' she's alive an' well an' all right, and the saints be praised for that same!"

Fred Henning and Arthur Helmsley ran down the steps—and the next moment Kate was clasped in the arms of her brother.

It was true. She was there, alive and safe, and Flush Fred hastened to add his congratulations to those of his friend.

"If you knew," said Arthur, "how Fred and the rest of us have sought for you—"

"I have heard of it," quickly responded Kate, "and I am deeply grateful to you and all the others."

She gave Fred her hand, and permitted him to hold it and lead her up to the porch.

There she was warmly welcomed by Leon Delarosse and the Brayhams, and refreshments were brought out and pressed upon her and those who had escorted her to the house.

Dennis helped himself freely to the wine, as he wanted to oil his tongue for the task before it.

Kitty permitted herself to be persuaded to taste it, as she felt that she needed nerve.

Leon Delarosse seated himself near Kate, and waited upon her in a fatherly fashion.

"I am more than glad to receive you here, my dear child," said he, "and my joy at your safety is greater than I can express to you. Your mother was a very dear friend of mine in my younger days, and that her daughter should disappear so strangely in this neighborhood was a great grief to me. Your friends have searched for you with unwearied ardor and patience, doing everything that love and skill could suggest, and striving to bear up against all discouragements. When they had nearly lost hope, you suddenly appear among us, as if a special providence had brought you, and now we must beg you to solve the mystery of your loss and your recovery."

"That's where I come in," briskly spoke up Dennis. "Kitty was the special providence. 'Twas Kitty that found her, as I told yez, an' where did yez think we kem across her, Fred?"

"That is too hard a conundrum for me, Dennis."

"Yez know the shpot we wint to, where the swamp sucker found the locket? 'Twas not far from that place that we kem across Miss Helmsley. 'Tis nigh the shwamp, yez know, an' I wanted to turn back, beca'se I'd seen enough o' thim shnakes an' things afore. But Kitty kep' leadin' me straight on, wid her finger p'intin' ahead. Thin I looked the way she p'inted, an' sure enough there sbtood the young leddy, as much like a ghost as anythin' mortal c'ud be—the saints presave us!"

"You were remarkably fortunate to find her," said General Brayham. "It is nothing less than wonderful. But, begad, sir, I would like to know what you and Kitty Tibbles were doing out there in the woods, at the edge of the swamp, after dark."

"That is what I want to know, too," said a harsh voice with an evident Yankee twang.

All looked around as the form of Zeke Tibbles loomed up on the porch.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DENNIS CRAWLS OUT OF IT.

THE appearance of the overseer put a decided damper upon the spirits of the party.

As the news of the arrival of Kate Helmsley and her companions spread rapidly about the plantation, it had soon reached his ears, and he had hastened to make a personal inspection of the wanderers, getting to the porch in time to hear the latter part of Dennis's story.

He had taken a lively interest with the others in the search for Miss Helmsley; but he was agitated just then by the return of his daughter, rather than by the discovery of the young lady.

The others could not help suspecting the real state of the case, but were ready to sympathize with the lovers.

Kitty Tibbles turned pale, but was reassured by the friendly grasp of Kate, who sat at her side.

As for Dennis, he was not in the least degree dismayed, but talked right on, without seeming to notice the presence of the overseer.

"That's jist phwat I was aft'er tellin' yez, gineral," said he. "It's the queerest thing intirely to thim as don't undbershtand it; but it's a fact, well known in the ould cuntry, that there's folks as have the power av findin' things that's lost. It's called the findin' eye, an' it's mostly purty girls as has it."

"Whin we was lookin' for this young leddy, an' not gittin' as much as a trace of her, it sbtruck me that Miss Tibbles had the findin' eye, an' I watched her, an' got acquainted wid her, an' looked at her close in all sorts of lights. Didn't I, Fred?"

"I have no doubt that you did, Dennis."

"An' there it was! I was sure that she had the findin' eye, an' was such a prize to go to waste whin Miss Helmsley was to be found! Not while Dennis Malone was to the fore."

"I told Miss Tibbles about it, an' talked to her ag'in and ag'in, an' at last I persuaded her to go off wid me an' find the young leddy."

"We wint, an' whin the power kem over her, she led me right on, niver turnin' to the right nor to the left, but all the time p'intin' straight ahead, until we saw Miss Helmsley sbtandin' there at the edge of the swamp."

"That is true," said Kate, determined to cor-

roborate as much of the story as she could. "When I caught sight of them she was pointing right at me."

"An' thin the power was too much for her, an' she dropped. But she had found Miss Helmsley, who w'd ha' died in the swamp, it's likely, if we hadn't kem across her."

"I believe that I would have perished there," interposed Kate. "I had lost my way, and could never have reached any habitation, and there were so many dangers in that horrible place."

"It was a truly remarkable affair," said General Brayham. "It would be almost incredible if we did not know that it had occurred. But begad, my friends, it seems to me that Mr. Malone has explained the presence of himself and Kitty Tibbles at that place and time quite satisfactorily."

A general murmur of assent greeted this expression of opinion.

"An' did anybody suppose," demanded Dennis, "that we w'd be goin' out there after dark, in the wuds an' shwamps, an' among the snakes an' all that, fur nothin'?"

"No, indeed!" chorused all but Zeke Tibbles.

"Or fur fun?"

"Oh, no!"

The feeling was clearly in favor of Dennis and Kitty; but Zeke Tibbles had not as yet said anything, or given any sign of approval or disapproval.

"I hope the explanation is satisfactory to Mr. Tibbles," Leon Delarosse mildly remarked, but with a look that plainly indicated what his own opinion was.

"I guess it is," replied the overseer; "but it's sor'er strange that they didn't ax my consent afore startin' out on sech a hunt."

"I knew we w'd niver ha' got it," promptly responded Dennis. "Yez w'd jist ha' said that it was all darned foolishness an' a crazy Irish trick."

"Wal, I don't know but yew're right about that. But I'm glad it turned out as well as it did."

This little difficulty being settled, or at least smoothed over, Kate was urged to tell her story, and she took it up from the time the Royal Arch left the sinking Sabine, bringing it down to her discovery by Dennis and Kitty.

When she gave an account of the island in the swamp, and of the refugees who inhabited it, her statements made a decided sensation.

"I have long suspected that there was something of that sort in the neighborhood," said General Brayham. "In fact, I have been almost sure of it. Now we know what it is, and will know what to do about it."

"But I was befriended there," insisted Kate. "I promised old Dinah that I would do nothing to bring harm to them."

"Oh, we will never hurt anybody who has helped you, my dear. We will be as kind to them as they will allow us to be. But that nest must be broken up."

"That Hexamer scoundrel must be found," declared Fred Henning. "I mean to hunt him down and bring him to justice, whatever happens."

When Kate made known the purpose of Jonas Hexamer, as he had explained it to her, in capturing her and taking her to the island, there was another sensation.

The old people were bewildered; but the three young men exchanged significant glances.

"I can't make that out," remarked General Brayham. "If there is any young gentleman in this neighborhood who answers to that description, and who is not already bespoken, I don't know who it is."

He named in succession the eligible sons of planters in the neighborhood, and canvassed them with his wife and Leon Delarosse; but they did not find one among them whom they would be willing to suspect.

"I can think of nobody," said the general, "who would be in the least degree likely to lend himself to such a scheme as that."

"And we have named them all," responded Leon Delarosse, "except my nephew."

"Your nephew? Why, Delarosse, he is almost a stranger here."

"Yes—we can't count him in. Perhaps, general, the scoundrel was lying to Miss Helmsley."

"That is quite likely."

Then the three young men looked at each other, but said nothing.

It would have been manifestly unjust for them to trouble their host and insult his nephew by the utterance of a bare suspicion.

When Kate approached the end of her story, and told of her last interview with Hexamer, at which he had declared his intention of taking her off the island that night and marrying her to the young gentleman of whom he had spoken, the perplexity of Leon Delarosse became readily painful.

He fidgeted in his chair, rubbed his forehead, and stared vacantly at the group about him.

"So the fellow was to meet her and marry her to-night," said he. "I wonder what has become of Paul."

Nobody ventured a suggestion on that point; but the three young men glanced at each other again.

"Does anybody know where Paul is to-night?"

All shook their heads, and there was a general silence.

It was surely pertinent to ask what had become of Paul; but that young gentleman so frequently absented himself from home, at all sorts of hours, without giving notice of his intention to do so, that this particular absence did not afford a sufficient ground for suspicion.

By the time Kate Helmsley had finished her story it was too late to discuss it in any of its bearings, and bed-time was proclaimed.

"We will go home now, Kitty, my child," said Zeke Tibbles. "Yew will need rest arter follerin' the power so far, and I'm glad there ain't any more folks to find."

Kate was taken in charge by Mrs. Bayham, and the three young men quietly dispersed.

"I wonder," said Leon Delarosse, as he drank his "night-cap" with General Brayham before going to bed—"I wonder where Paul is to-night."

CHAPTER XXV.

EVENTS AND COMPLICATIONS.

CHANGES occurred in the Delarosse household after the arrival of Kate Helmsley.

There was a decided change in the position and treatment of the heir-expectant of the estate; but it was not a sudden change.

He got home late at night or early in the morning—nobody about the premises could give the hour with any degree of exactness—and did not make his appearances until after breakfast.

By that time he had got from one of the servants a pretty fair account of the discovery of the young lady and her story, and when he came down-stairs he was prepared to welcome her and to congratulate everybody.

But he was first met by his uncle, who took the young gentleman into his private room, and began to question him.

"You were out very late last night, Paul," said Leon Delarosse.

"Rather late, as it happened."

"How did it happen? Where were you?"

"After supper I went to Martigny, when I stopped somewhat longer than I had expected to, and I lost my way as I was coming home."

"I had not supposed that you could find such strong attractions in so small a place as Martigny."

"The fact is," replied Paul, "that I went there to look up a clew to Miss Helmsley which I had happened to hear of; but it proved to be of no value."

"I suppose you have heard that the young lady has been found, and that she is here."

"I have just heard it, sir, and I am anxious to see her and learn all the particulars of her disappearance. I am very glad that she is safe, and am only sorry that I was not the one who had the luck to find her."

This ended the interview, which left with Paul the impression that, though his answers ought to have satisfied his uncle, that gentleman had on his mind some doubt or suspicion which he was not prepared to disclose.

Consequently Paul was disturbed and uneasy, by no means in a mood for welcoming the fair guest as warmly as he had intended to.

When he had heard the young lady's story fully, he was able to guess at the sort of suspicion that had been raised against him, and her presence in the house and subsequent developments did not tend to restore his confidence or put him in a good humor.

For Kate Helmsley remained there, and her stay promised—or threatened—to be indefinitely continued.

Early in the morning after her arrival, Mr. Delarosse had sent to Mrs. Brenner the news of her safety, with a further message which brought the old lady to Gravelly Bayou in a hurry.

With Mrs. Brenner, came a miscellaneous assortment of dry goods, made up and in the piece, and she and Mrs. Brayham speedily made the girl more than presentable.

But when it was proposed that Kate should then proceed to her original destination, Leon Delarosse protested most earnestly.

Her presence had already brightened up the old house amazingly, and in the eyes of Leon Delarosse she possessed all the beauty he had admired in her mother, with more than her mother's strength of character.

"You must surely lend her to me for a while, my dear Mrs. Brenner," said he. "You know what she is to me as her mother's daughter, and I must say that I have taken a great liking to her for her own sake."

"Besides, I doubt if it would be safe to take her away just at present. I have consulted Dr. Addis, who says that she must have perfect rest and quiet for a while."

"You know what she has passed through, and it is by no means certain that her troubles are yet at an end. The scoundrel who captured her may have further designs upon her, and she could be better guarded and defended here than at your place."

"Decidedly you must let her remain here until she gets rested and further investigations can be made. Mrs. Brayham will take care of

her, and it will be an added pleasure to know that her presence here will bring you to Gravelly Bayou more frequently."

This was a very pretty speech, and its arguments were quite plausible.

Mrs. Brenner suffered herself to be persuaded, for Kate's sake, as she said, and because the manner of the old gentleman's speech gave her the impression that the visit might result in some benefit to the girl.

So Kate Helmsley remained as a guest at Gravelly Bayou, and was made much of there, while on all sides Paul Delarosse was snubbed, and regarded with coldness, if not with actual suspicion.

There was good reason for this coldness, especially on the part of his uncle.

A few days after Kate's arrival that gentleman had a brief conversation with his old friend, General Brayham.

"You will remember, Brayham," said he, "that we wondered where my nephew was, the night that Kate came here."

"We did—rather."

"I asked him about it, and he told me that he had been to Martigny to look up a clew that he had heard of."

"That was satisfactory, I should say."

"It would have been, if it had been true."

"Then it was not true?"

"It was an utter falsehood—not a word of truth in the statement."

The general whistled.

"I sent Mr. Henning to Martigny to make inquiries," continued Leon Delarosse, "and he reported to me as an absolute certainty that Paul was not in the village that night."

"You can rely upon Henning's report, of course. He is a man of truth, and not easily deceived. Where was your nephew, then, on that night?"

"That is a question which I am not ready to answer."

"Have you taxed him with his falsehood?"

"Not yet, and I am in no hurry to do so. I am hoping to learn something more."

"If we could catch that scoundrel, Hexamer, we would squeeze the truth out of him."

"He must be caught, if possible."

Another event of interest was the departure of Arthur Helmsley.

Believing his sister to be safe and in good hands, he said that he could no longer delay his return to his family and his plantation, and he hastened back to Tennessee.

Fred Henning remained, because Mr. Delarosse pressed him to do so, and because he was anxious to capture Jonas Hexamer and bring him to justice.

It may be supposed that the presence of Kate Helmsley also had something to do with keeping him at Gravelly Bayou.

Dennis Malone had no 'bought of going away while Fred stayed there, and that served him as a sufficient excuse, though there could be no doubt that Kitty Tibbles was the main attraction that held him.

He was very circumspect in that quarter, however, as he was obliged to be.

Zeke Tibbles watched his daughter closely, and Kitty, though she loved Dennis none the less, was determined to be patient and risk no more escapades.

But the overseer had something else to do with his eye besides keeping it on his daughter.

About this time he had a matter on his mind that gave him no little worry.

In the course of time he deemed it necessary to speak to Mr. Delarosse of what troubled him.

"There's gittin' to be suthin' queer about these niggers of aourn, boss," was his introductory remark.

"Something queer? I have noticed nothing. What do you mean, Mr. Tibbles?"

"Wal, there ain't nothin' I could lay a finger on, or really make a point of; but there's signs that caunt with a man who knows them as well as I do, and there's what I might call a kind o' feelin' in the air."

"What sort of signs and feeling? Please be as definite as you can be."

"The fact is, Mr. Delarosse, that there's tew or three of the field hands that I'm kind o' 'feard of. They look an' act as if they war meditat' suthin'."

"An outbreak? An insurrection?"

"Suthin' in that line. I think they've been consortin' with other bad niggers, and they whisper about on the sly, and I don't like their looks and ways. As I said afore, there ain't nothin' I could lay a finger on; but I've got that sort o' feelin'."

"I am sure, Mr. Tibbles, that they are all as well treated as they reasonably can be."

"No set of hands better treated anywhere, sir; but there's black sheep in every flock."

"There must be something in what you say. You are not a man to worry about nothing. Of course you will continue to keep an eye on them."

"Oh, I'll watch 'em like a hawk, sir, and if I git an idee that there's any real danger, I'll let yew know at once. I thought it would be right ter speak tew yew about it."

"Quite right. I will go among them myself."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN IMPORTANT INTERVIEW.

FRED HENNING, after the question of Kate Helmsley's disappearance had been settled by her recovery, busied himself in a quiet search for Jonas Hexamer, aided by Dennis Malone and a reliable man of the vicinity.

He had hoped to engage the assistance of Saul Stiner in that quest, but had been unable to do so.

He met the swamp sucker once by accident, and found him deaf to all entreaties and offers of reward.

Saul told him that he would have been willing, for Fred's sake, to aid in the search for the missing girl; but she was found, and he could do nothing more. It was none of his business, and he did not want to mix in any such matters. He and his father had reasons that were satisfactory to them for wishing to keep to themselves, and they meant to do so.

Flush Fred's search, carefully as it was carried on, did not promise success.

He and his allies could hear nothing more of Jonas Hexamer, nor could they find the faintest trace of him.

They were driven to the conclusion that their only chance would be to make a raid on the island in the swamp, in the hope of finding him there.

But that would mean a fight, with more or less bloodshed, and General Brayham insisted upon having legal authority for the undertaking.

Kate Helmsley opposed it, too, as she had promised that no harm should come to those who had befriended her there, and her wish had great weight with Fred Henning.

There was one person at Gravelly Bayou, however, who knew where Hexamer could be found, and who was in communication with him.

That person was, of course, Paul Delarosse, and he was the last person who would have consented to betray the hunted man.

They met—by no means frequently, as Paul had reason to fear that he might be watched—not at the Frenchman's cabin across the bayou, but at a glade in the forest—a rendezvous which might be considered quite safe in the daytime, and which they were sure nobody would happen on at night.

Thither went Paul Delarosse one dark night, taking a roundabout course to reach it, and stopping every now and then to look back and make sure that he was not followed.

The meeting was evidently by appointment, as he found Jonas Hexamer impatiently awaiting him in the glade.

"You are late, my boy," was Hexamer's greeting, accompanied by an oath. "What kept you?"

"Nothing kept me. I started early enough, but had to be very careful how I came here, as somebody might be dogging my heels in the hope of finding you."

"Has it come to that? They are getting a little too sharp over there, if you speak the truth."

"Of course I speak the truth. You don't know how I am worried in one way and another."

"I think I have the worst end of the row, but we ought to be able to stand it, as there's rich diggings for both of us. What's the news?"

"Bad news, every bit of it. That girl is there yet, and the old man is all taken up with her. You would think she was his own daughter, by the way he pets her and hangs about her. Why did you ever let her go?"

"Why did I let her go?" angrily demanded Hexamer. "Why did I let her go? Are you crazy, young man? Don't you know that somebody on that island played me false and turned her loose? Ain't that the way she told the story, herself? I only wish she would give the name of the nigger who carried her over the water. Why did I turn her loose, indeed?"

"I didn't mean that," grumbled Paul. "But it is a great pity that she wasn't kept more securely."

"So it is. But there's no use crying over spilt milk. And it was no fault of mine. I did the best I could, and thought I had a sure thing. I don't know to this hour who it was that went back on me, every cuss on the island denies it, and I can't afford to have a fuss with them. It was a good job badly spoiled, and you now see that I was right in trying to put it through."

"About the girl?" queried Paul.

"About the girl, of course. I knew that if she ever struck this country, and Leon Delarosse set his eyes on her, he would everlastingly freeze to her, for her mother's sake. I knew, too, that you were not a bit the sort of chap to get on with him. You have got fewer winning ways to work into the favor of such a man than anybody I can think of. Then, when he got to disliking you, and had her for a prime favorite, the chances are that he would be just queer enough to give you the cold cut, and let her into all his property."

"It would be queer indeed if he should shut out his own flesh and blood."

Jonas Hexamer laughed.

"His own flesh and blood's good," said he—"it is very good. But we will let it pass, if that sort of talk pleases you. If I could have married you to the girl, it would have been all right. The flesh and blood business and the old sweetheart arrangement would have caught him for all he was worth."

Clearly there was no sentiment in the composition of Jonas Hexamer.

"But she slipped through my fingers, and all the fat is in the fire. How does it look to you now? Who is ahead—you or she? Unless I'm greatly mistaken, the girl is at the top of the heap."

Paul mournfully admitted that the fact was correctly stated.

"I suppose there is no chance for you to make up to her and marry her," suggested Hexamer.

"Not the faintest shadow of a chance. She looks at me as she would look at a snake."

"Snakes have a way of making people look at them like that. It must be your style that makes her dislike you, as I have carefully kept your name out of the matter."

"So you say; but you must have let something slip that she could take hold of. They suspect me, among them there, especially that meddlesome Henning. The old man has taken to treating me very colly, and has not had a pleasant word to say to me since she came. He has more than hinted that he was likely to divide his property between me and that girl."

"We can't stand that!" exclaimed Hexamer. "When it came to dividing your half with me, you would have only a fourth left, and that would be worth nothing to you. It must be all or none, and we have no time to lose in striking for all."

"But what can we do?" demanded Paul.

"I have already been at work, looking ahead to this very thing. It is plain from what you say that his will is now in your favor, or that he has made none. In either case you are the heir as the matter stands. Before he can make a change in the situation he must be put out of the reach of pens and ink and paper—out of the way of making a will."

"Where?" hoarsely whispered Paul.

"Out of the world."

"Would you kill him?"

"I mean to kill him, to speak plainly, and that right away."

It may be said for Paul, as a fact slightly to his credit, that he was evidently shocked by this proposition when it was presented to him so sharply.

But he soon got over that feeling, and his face brightened at the prospect that was opened up to him.

"If the old man was dead," said he, "that is, if he was out of the way, I would come into everything without any question. That would make a sure thing of the business."

"And it is the only way to make a sure thing," responded Hexamer. "When the girl got away I knew that it would come to this."

"But how can it be done, and who will do it?"

"I have been at work, as I told you. You needn't think that I would trust you to do the job. You are vicious enough, no doubt; but you haven't got the nerve or the brains. I have been getting the Moccasins in training for a grand strike, and they are about ripe for it. Besides promising them money in plenty, I have made them believe that Leon Delarosse means to make a raid on the island and run the blacks over into the market."

"One of the smartest of them has been working around the Gravelly Bayou niggers, and has got three of them where we want them. They will join my Moccasins when the blow is struck."

"When will that be?" inquired Paul.

"Right soon. You've got such a tell-tale face that it won't do for you to know too much. Right soon you may expect the blow to fall, like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky, and there will be weeping and wailing at Gravelly Bayou. My greatest trouble will be to keep the scamps from burning the house, and we can't afford to destroy our own property—oh, Paul?"

"What shall I do?"

"You may make a sham fight if you want to, or get frightened out of your wits if you choose. The Moccasins know you, and you won't get hurt."

"I will rely upon you, then, to settle the business."

"You may do that. I am going to lead trumps right along. Good-night, and try to keep a cool head and make as little bother as possible."

Paul glided away, and Jonas Hexamer sighed as he looked after him.

"If the boy was the right sort," he muttered, "it would be ever so much easier for me."

CHAPTER XXVII.

LEON DELAROSSE SPEAKS PLAINLY.

THE next morning Paul Delarosse was filled with a feeling of exultation which he could not repress.

He was not accustomed to concealing emotions of that sort, and the immediate prospect of coming into possession of the Gravelly Bayou estate, with all that the possession implied, took entire control of his thoughts.

His elation was manifest in his tone and his manner—so much so that it attracted the attention of Fred Henning and Dennis Malone, who watched him curiously.

"Jist tumble to the shyle av young Black an' Crusty," said the Irishman. "It's a high head he carries this mornin'. Don't he luk as if he smelt a mouse, though?"

"I would judge that he smells something sweeter than that," answered Fred. "He looks as if he fancied that he has struck it rich somewhere or somehow. But, if any good-luck has happened to him, it has not been in this house, as I have good reason to know. I would give a pretty to know what has come over him."

Paul was doubtless at that moment congratulating himself upon being able soon to expel both of them from the mansion.

He already felt his position to be so secure that he did not hesitate to show his dislike for them.

But his elation was destined to be followed by a period of depression.

The time for a change arrived when his uncle invited him into his private room for a little conversation.

As Paul seated himself there, he knew that his nerves were about to undergo a strain, and braced himself for the ordeal.

"You will remember, Paul," Mr. Delarosse began, "that I asked you a while ago where you were the night that Miss Helmsley came here."

"Yes, sir, and I told you," answered Paul, who could guess at what was coming.

"Have the kindness to repeat the statement which you then made to me."

"What is the matter with you?" testily demanded the young man. "Why should you pick out that night, of all the nights when I have been away, to question me about it again and again?"

"I have a sufficient reason. Please repeat that statement."

"I told you that I went in to Martigny, to look up a clew."

"Just so. But you were not at Martigny that night."

"What right have you to say that, sir? Do you know that you are accusing me of a falsehood?"

"Yes, and my right is unquestionable. I took pains to cause careful inquiries to be made at Martigny, and ascertained beyond a doubt that you were not there."

This was quite plain and pointed, but Paul was disposed to show fight.

"Perhaps you consider that a fair and decent way of treating me," he said. "Who made those

"I have no objection to telling you, though you

have no right to ask the question. It was Mr. Henning."

"That fellow! A common gambler and swindler! Of course he is mean enough to be a spy. So you take his word in preference to mine?"

"I do," coldly replied Mr. Delarosse.

The case had become desperate, but the young man was disposed to brazen it out.

"If I was not at Martigny, where was I?"

The answer came quickly and with stunning force.

"You went to meet Jonas Hexamer, the man who had decoyed away and captured Miss Helmsley, and you expected with his aid to make that young lady your wife."

Paul was crushed.

His uncle's statement was so direct and positive, that it was hard to believe that he was drawing inferences, instead of giving facts of which he had actual knowledge.

"What was your object in that?" demanded Mr. Delarosse.

It is said that an honest confession is good for the soul. A forced confession may also sometimes benefit the offender, though not really a solace to his soul.

There was nothing left to Paul Delarosse but to confess what he apparently could not help confessing, and to throw himself on the mercy of the court.

He burst into tears; but Leon Delarosse had seen his tears before, and was not moved by them.

"I've had very hard lines," he moaned. "I have tried to do well, but ever since I have been here I haven't seemed to suit you, and you were getting more and more set against me. Then I heard that Miss Helmsley was coming here, and I was told—that is, I had reason to believe—that you would be likely to adopt her and send me to the wall."

"Who told you so?"

"Hexamer. He said that it was a sure thing, and that my only chance was to marry her. He said that she would be glad to marry me, and that he would arrange it so that there would be no trouble, and then you would think more of me for her sake, and it would be the best thing for all concerned. But I assure you, sir, that I never knew that she was anywhere about here until he sent me word that she was ready to marry me."

"Really?" replied Mr. Delarosse, with a fine sarcastic reflection on the query—"not even when we were all searching for her, and you were pretending to join in the search?"

Paul had put his foot in it by opening his mouth once too often.

"I would prefer not to hear anything more from you on that subject," continued the old gentleman. "It is enough to know that you conspired with a scoundrel for a rascally purpose, and you need not stretch your conscience any further. You have laid yourself liable to a criminal charge, which I do not propose to press; but I will know how to treat you hereafter. As for my estate, which you have supposed would be yours—"

"You don't mean to cut me off!" imploringly broke in Paul. "You won't be hard on your own flesh and blood."

"You are not a bit like your father, young man. He and I did not get along well together; but I never knew him to tell a lie or to be guilty of a mean action. I do not know from whom you can have inherited your rascally qualities. I shall provide for what you call my own flesh and blood in my own way. I have not yet determined what that way will be; but, if you want any further favors from me, there is one thing you must do at the start."

"What is that, sir?" humbly inquired Paul.

"I have no doubt that you are still in communication with that scoundrel, Hexamer, and you must put us in the way of arresting him and bringing him to justice. I do not suppose that you are any too good to betray your confederate, and you must do this very soon."

"I will do the best I can, sir."

"You must do that very thing, and when it is done I will decide what I shall do for you. But I have no hesitation in saying that your expectations will no longer be what they were. You may go now."

He went. In fact he sneaked out of the room like a whipped hound, and hastened to get away from the sight of everybody.

His exultation and elation were all gone, and in their place was bitter hatred of his uncle and everybody in that house.

With his hatred was mingled an intense and almost insane desire for revenge on all the causes and witnesses of his humiliation.

He had promised to betray Jonas Hexamer; but had no intention of keeping his promise while he could evade its performance.

He would put off that job as long as he could, expecting something to happen very shortly that would change the situation completely.

As Napoleon wished for night or Blucher, so did Paul Delarosse wish for Jonas Hexamer and his Moccasins.

He was not the only one who was exercised on that subject.

If he had heard the report that Zeke Tibbles brought to Mr. Delarosse that evening, he would have had better reason for confidence in the near future.

"There's rasily suthin' goin' to happen about here, and that purty sudden," was the formidable communication that the overseer made to the proprietor of the plantation.

"Anything new?" inquired Mr. Delarosse, suddenly turning pale.

"There yew've got me ag'in. It's jist the old thing; but it has worked up until it looks as if it had come to a head. There's tew of the hard cases, Caleb an' Nero, that have got some devilment afoot, as sart'n as I stand here. They as much as told me so a bit ago."

Leon Delarosse had not a drop of coward blood in his veins, and though he was getting on in years, he was a man of quick and decisive action.

"We must take those men and tie them and shut them up," said he. "We will thus put a stop to their schemes and force the truth from them. We must do it at once."

He called Fred Henning and Dennis Malone, and the four men armed themselves and went to the negro-quarters.

They did not find the two "hard cases," Caleb and Nero.

Those men were not in their appointed places, but had suddenly disappeared, and nobody knew what had become of them.

A third man, who had also been suspected by Zeke Tibbles, was likewise missing.

"This means mischief," said Fred Henning, expressing the opinion of the others.

"No doubt of that," responded Mr. Delarosse. "The trouble is that we do not know what sort of mischief is meant, and therefore are not in a good position to guard against it. It may be that those men have merely run away. If so, they are not likely to get far. If there were danger of an insurrection we would have had some echoes of it from other plantations, as they must have many confederates. Even Mr. Tibbles is not Yankee enough to guess at what they mean to do, and we can only prepare our arms and ammunition and stand ready to protect our lives and property."

After a thorough search for the missing negroes, which resulted in making their disappearance a matter of certainty, the party returned to the house and discussed the situation.

From this discussion the ladies were necessarily excluded, as it was desired that they should not be alarmed.

But the secrecy itself excited their curiosity, and they could easily guess that danger of some sort was apprehended.

Paul Delarosse was also excluded, because nobody trusted him.

When the men had come to the conclusion that they could do nothing but wait, with their weapons in readiness, they went out on the front porch, to smoke their cigars in the night air.

While they were there a negro boy came up with a message.

"Dar's a man out yar," said he, "who wants to see Mr. Hennin'."

"What is his name?" asked Fred.

"He didn't gib me no name, sah."

"Is he a white man?"

"Tol'able white, I reckon. He looks like a pore white, an' he's got a pow'ful big dog."

"I will go to him at once."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SAUL AND SATAN.

As Fred Henning supposed, it was Saul Stiner who sent the message, and he was found waiting in the shadow of the trees at a little distance from the house.

He carried a rifle, and Satan was crouched near him.

"I am very glad to find you here," said Fred, as he grasped the hand of the swamp sucker. "I was afraid that I was not to have the pleasure of seeing you again."

"You wouldn't see me now, especially at this place," answered Saul, "if it wasn't to give warning to you folks here. There's a cloud about to burst, and the lightning will strike this place to-night."

"Indeed! We have had a hint of trouble of some sort. Do you know in what shape it is to come?"

"Those runaway niggers at the island in the swamp where the young lady was are going to strike this place to-night. You know about them, as some of them struck our cabin the night you were there. They have picked up some others about the neighborhood, and of course there is a white man to lead them on; but I don't know who he is."

"I can guess your warning has come none too soon. There is no time to lose. Will you go up to the house with me?"

"That is what I'm here for. Satan and I have come to do what we can to help you."

"You and Satan are worth half a dozen men. From the bottom of my heart I thank you."

The party on the porch had been wondering who or what Henning's late visitor could be, and their wonder was none the less when he came to them with a poorly-dressed young man accompanied by a big dog.

Fred introduced the stranger as "my friend, Saul Stiner," and hastily made known the news that the young man had brought.

"How did you get hold of this information, Mr. Stiner?" asked Leon Delarosse, who was always courteous to everybody.

Fred noticed that Saul at once put on the semi-idiotic style which he had worn when he was exhibiting his snake at Natchez, and which was surely not his rightful manner.

But he made himself understood easily enough, and said that while he was looking for night-birds in the woods he had seen a meeting of negroes whom he knew to be bad ones.

He had crawled near them and overheard their talk, from which he learned that they intended to make an attack on Gravelly Bayou that night.

He did not know what the size of the attacking force would be, nor what was its object, nor who was its leader; but the information he had gained was so important that he hastened to put it where it would do the most good.

"Could there be any mistake about this, Mr. Henning?" asked Leon Delarosse.

"I would stake my life on the truth of everything my friend says," answered Fred.

Leon Delarosse acted promptly.

He sent a trusty young negro, well-mounted, to the three plantations nearest to Gravelly Bayou, requesting immediate assistance.

Then, with the assistance of General Brayham, he established a system of guard and picket duty, and Dennis Malone was sent out into the grounds as the first picket.

The ladies had by this time got fairly on the scent of the excitement, and their anxiety could only be appeased by giving them exact information of the state of affairs.

Then they were calm, and no person on the plantation was cooler than they.

Mrs. Brayham had no more fear in her composition than that veteran of the Mexican war, her husband, and Kate Helmsley was of the same stamp.

It was proper that they should have a special defense, and for that purpose Saul Stiner's idea was adopted.

When they had taken up their quarters in a room

that could not readily be reached, the big hound was introduced to them by his master.

Satan made their acquaintance after the fashion that was peculiar to him, showing by his look and manner that he understood the duty that was expected of him.

Then he laid down in front of the door, on guard.

When the men had done all they could do, having got their arms and ammunition fully ready, with a few articles to be possibly used for barricading purposes, there was nothing for them but to wait.

Leon Delarosse had already inquired concerning his nephew.

As it was the general suspicion that Jonas Hexamer was responsible for the expected raid, it was only natural that he should want to know what had become of Paul, who had not been visible since that depressing scene with his uncle.

He was found sulking in his room, and it was judged best not to disturb him.

The task of waiting was anything but a pleasant one.

Waiting for any event over which those who wait have no control is apt to beget restlessness and nervousness; but waiting for an expected conflict, in which our lives and the lives of those who are dear to us are at stake, is trying to the strongest nerves.

It was a relief to know what they had to expect, but perplexing to feel that they could not tell when or in what shape or from what quarter the attack might come.

The mansion at Gravelly Bayou was very poorly adapted for purposes of defense.

It might well have been said to be open to the world, as the broad porch entirely surrounded it, and it was so constructed as to give the freest access and passage to the air and to its occupants, as it was all windows and doors.

The doors might have been managed; but so many of the windows were nearly level with the porch that it was quite out of the question to think of barricading them.

There was nothing in the way of defense possible, therefore, except a square stand up fight, and the defenders could only hope that their assailants would attack in a body, so that they might be fairly met, without a division of force.

Midnight had come and passed, and the watchers began to yawn and stretch themselves.

They had foregone their cigars, and the Gravelly Bayou wines had been touched but lightly, as it was necessary that they should have clear heads and steady nerves.

"I hope it is a false alarm," said Leon Delarosse, as he drew a long breath. "It seems as if we ought to have seen something of them by this time if they were coming. It can't be long, now, before we hear from Poindexter's people. They are sure to start as soon as word reaches them."

"I am afraid it will not prove to be a false alarm," remarked Fred Henning.

"Perhaps not; but I hope it is."

"It is not!" exclaimed Saul Stiner as he started up. "There they are!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MOCCASINS' DEADLY FANGS.

ALL looked when Saul Stiner spoke; but declared that they saw nothing.

Their eyes were not, as his were, able to distinguish objects in the darkness almost as well as in the daylight.

"I am sure that I saw a man moving about there in the shrubbery," said Saul. "Look! there he is again!"

Fred Henning saw the object then, and he jumped to his feet and hailed it.

"Who's that? Who goes there?"

There was no answer, and it was not thought worth while to leave the house and look for intruders. Again they waited, and the next evidence of the presence of enemies came in a more startling manner.

The report and flash of a firearm came from behind a tree near the house, and a bullet whizzed close to the head of Leon Delarosse.

This challenge was immediately accepted; but the sound of the answering shot was almost lost in the noise and confusion that immediately ensued.

It seemed as if a band of demons had suddenly been evolved out of the darkness.

The racket they made well deserved to be styled infernal.

The reports of various kinds of firearms followed each other in rapid succession, mingled with such hideous yells and howls as could only proceed from the throats of savages, or of negroes infuriated by rum.

In their room the two women heard those horrible noises, and started up in alarm; but Satan gave forth his thunderous growl without stirring from his position.

Fast and furious as the shots were, all but the first flew wide of the mark, or were fired at random.

"Bah! We will soon settle with that scum," said Fred Henning as he drew his revolver.

But his opinion changed when the yelling and howling pack rushed up to the house, apparently from all directions, and its few defenders, separated and bewildered, found themselves hotly engaged in a hand-to-hand fight that was no boy's play.

Where was Dennis Malone?

How had all those blacks got so near the house without his knowledge; and what had become of him?

The attacking force, which appeared to be composed entirely of negroes, had the advantage of numbers and ferocity; but the defenders had cooler heads, better weapons, and more skill in their use.

When it came to a close conflict with revolvers, the resources of the white men were sure to count. They also had at the outset the advantage of a central position.

But that was soon lost to them, and at first it seemed that all must be lost, as the house swarmed with savage and demonic negroes, who had suddenly forced their way in at the doors and windows, and were rushing frantically through the rooms and passages.

Then the revolvers began to crack briskly, if not merrily, and every white man stood up to his work as if the entire defense depended upon himself alone.

With each the thought of the women was foremost, steadying every nerve, and quickening every fiber to its intensest action.

Old General Brayham, with his back to a wall, faced his foes as coolly as he had done at Resaca de la Palma.

Leon Delarosse, too, had suddenly thrown off the burden of his years, and was full of fire and action.

As for Fred Henning and Saul Stiner, they seemed to be everywhere at once, and wherever they went they made a vacancy.

Satan remained crouched as his master had placed him.

His time for action had not yet arrived.

But it soon came, and he proved himself the right dog in the right place.

Two of the wild negroes, armed with clubs, dashed into the passage that led to the room in which Mrs. Brayham and Kate had taken refuge.

Doubtless they had no special object in view; but the sight of the women through the open door inflamed them, and they rushed forward, expecting to find an easy prey.

Kate stepped forward to close the door; but Satan was there.

Only for an instant was he there.

Then, with a savage growl, he bounded forward like a black avalanche, his big body darkening the passage, and leaped upon the foremost of the negroes.

Borne backward to the floor by the force of the spring, the man had scarcely a chance to yell, when those cruel jaws closed upon his throat.

His companion, frightened out of his wits, turned and fled more swiftly than he had come.

After a few seconds, leaving the negro stretched motionless on the floor of the passage, Satan returned and crouched down in his place.

Mrs. Brayham uttered a brief prayer of thankfulness.

"We, at least, are well defended," said Kate.

The yelling and the shooting had aroused Paul Delarosse, who had remained shut up in his room, waiting as those below were waiting.

But he did not know that they were waiting, as he had not cared to venture down stairs to find out what was going on.

He had no reason to believe that anything unusual was in progress or expected by them, as all was quiet about the place until the sudden attack was made.

Then he jumped up, full of excitement and eager expectation.

Jonas Hexamer had kept his word, and the blow was struck that was to make him free and wealthy.

Why should he not play his part by making a sham fight, as Hexamer had told him he might?

Perhaps he could do something better than that, if he made a good use of his chances.

"It will be queer if I don't get even with some of them now," he muttered, as he seized his pistol and hurried down stairs.

Just at that moment, when Fred Henning, having found himself hard pressed, had dispatched a stalwart negro who had rushed upon him unexpectedly, he was startled by two shots right near him.

A bullet whizzed by his head, and another grazed his left shoulder.

He turned quickly, and saw Paul Delarosse standing at a little distance from him, in the act of cocking his revolver.

Fred sprang upon the young man, and seized his pistol-hand, jerking it up.

"What are you doing here, you young rascal?" he sharply demanded.

"Who are you calling a rascal?" angrily replied Paul. "Do you know who you are talking to?"

"What are you doing here, I say?"

"Helping you fight. Can't you see that?"

"What were you shooting at?"

"That nigger there."

"You lie! You were shooting at me, and you hit me, too."

"You must be crazy to say such a thing."

"If not, you are too bad a shot to be trusted with firearms. Give me that pistol."

Paul was not disposed to give it up without a struggle, and Fred Henning, launching out his right fist with all the force of a thoroughly angry man, knocked him down and took the pistol from him.

This little fracas had prevented Fred from going to the assistance of Leon Delarosse, who was just then sorely beset.

The old gentleman was in the main hall, near the door that opened on the front porch.

There he was attacked by a half-naked negro, armed with a heavy, old-fashioned pistol, which he leveled at close range and pulled the trigger.

It missed fire, and Leon Delarosse sent a bullet from his own revolver into his antagonist's body.

This ought to have settled him; but the stubborn and reckless brute cocked and leveled his pistol again.

Before the hammer could fall, the last bullet from the old gentleman's revolver pierced his breast, and made an end of his fighting activity.

As the negro fell, a heavily-built white man sprang forward from the porch upon the then defenseless proprietor of Gravelly Bayou.

With his left hand he seized Leon Delarosse by the throat, and in his right he held a knife, which rose and fell twice upon the old gentleman's breast before the murderous work could be interrupted.

The interruption came from Fred Henning.

As soon as he had got Paul Delarosse off his hands, he ran to help his old friend, uttering a fierce cry as he saw the assassin at his work.

The cry startled the white man, who darted back to the porch, jumped down to the ground, and ran away, but not before Flush Fred had recognized him as the man whom he had first seen at Martigny, and afterward on the Sabine.

Fred snapped Paul Delarosse's pistol at him as he went, but without effect, as the young man had discharged the only chambers that happened to be loaded.

Then he turned his attention to the old gentleman, who had sunk upon the floor of the hall, bleeding freely from two terrible wounds.

As Fred raised him in his arms, vainly endeavoring to stop the flow of blood, he chanced to look up, and saw Paul Delarosse standing near by, regarding the scene with a look of exultation which there could be no mistaking.

CHAPTER XXX.

DENNIS MALONE'S CLOSE CALL.

The last blow that was struck by the leader of the Moccasins was the worst and the most effective of their efforts, and the conflict was soon over.

It had, indeed, occupied but a brief space of time, as it was short and sharp, though not decisive.

The decisive moment came directly after Mr. Delarosse was struck down.

Then several white men came galloping over the lawn, shouting as they urged their horses toward the house.

They were men from Poindexter's and Moriceau's plantations, who had received the message sent by Leon Delarosse, and had been prompt to hasten to his aid.

At the sound of their shouts the remaining negroes hurried out of the house, and made the best of their way to the woods.

But the new-comers, directed by Saul Stiner, overhauled and captured more than one of them before they could make good their escape.

Leon Delarosse was carefully carried into his own room, and the nearest physician was sent for in hot haste.

The question then arose, what had become of Dennis Malone, who had not been seen since the struggle began.

Zeke Tibbles was also missing from the house, though he had been there at the moment of the attack.

The cause of their absence was not ascertained until matters about the mansion had measurably settled down.

Dennis Malone had gone out on picket; but he seemed to consider that his duty required him to watch particularly the house in which Kitty Tibbles lived with her father.

It might have been noticed that he always quickened his pace at the part of his round that brought him in that direction, and it must be confessed that his round did not extend very far beyond that quarter.

Once when he neared the cottage he saw Kitty standing in front of it.

She had doubtless seen him several times, and at last she ventured out to have a word with him.

Dennis hastened to her, but only to let her know that that was no time for love-making.

"Och, wirra, wirra, Kitty me darlint!" he exclaimed, "phwativer be's you doin' out here annyhow?"

Kitty answered that she fancied that he wanted to see her, and had stepped out to speak to him.

"But it's in the house yez must be, alannah, shut up as tight as a drum, beca'se there's goin' to be the divil to pay on this plantation the night."

Kitty, whose father was up at the mansion, wanted to know what was the matter, and Dennis told her briefly but plainly.

"So yez see, Kitty dear, yez must git into the house, an' lock up yer swate self, an' kape out av the way whin the fightin' begins."

"But who will take care of me, Dennis, if the fightin' comes over here?"

"It won't come over here, an' it's meself will look afther yez wid all the eyes I've got. Run in now, darlint; fur I must go an' watch fur the inimy."

Dennis started on his rounds, but Kitty did not go into the house immediately.

Her father had not told her that there was anything wrong, and she had not witnessed any unusual commotion or excitement about the place, and she was not sure that her lover was not trying to "run a rig" on her.

Consequently she suffered her curiosity to overrule her discretion, and remained out-of-doors, watching the receding figure of Dennis until it was lost in the darkness.

When the shots and yells of the attacking Moccasins startled the plantation, Kitty knew at once that she had not been deceived, and started to run into the house.

But there was a formidable obstacle in the way.

Caleb and Nero, the two bad negroes belonging to the plantation who were with the assailants, had an object of their own to serve in joining the Moccasins, besides the general purpose in which they co-operated with the others.

They wanted to work out a special spite against Zeke Tibbles.

With that end in view, they did not accompany the others in the rush upon the house, but took a straight course to the overseer's cottage.

They reached it in time to find Kitty outside, and to cut off her retreat.

Nothing could have suited them better.

In no way could they strike the overseer so effectively as through his daughter.

Zeke Tibbles heard her shriek when she found herself confronted by the two black men who had become fiends.

He had just then rushed from the front to the back porch to meet the attack in that quarter.

A Moccasin who had just mounted the porch aimed a furious blow at him with a club as that shriek rung in his ears.

Scarcely stepping aside to dodge the blow, the overseer fired his pistol in the face of his assailant, and the man tumbled backward down the steps.

At the same instant Zeke Tibbles leaped to the ground, and ran to the aid of his daughter.

But Dennis Malone was there before him.

The Irishman was returning toward the cottage when he was startled by the sudden outburst of shooting and yelling.

Above all that horrid concert of hideous noises he heard Kitty's cry, and he ran like a deer to the spot where he had left her.

He saw her struggling in the grasp of a big negro, while another was rapidly approaching them.

Cocking his rifle as he ran, Dennis halted just long enough to bring it to his shoulder and fire at the man who was running.

Seizing the discharged weapon by the barrel, he then rushed upon the other.

The fellow at whom he fired had dropped, and his comrade, startled by the shot and the fall, loosed his hold of Kitty, and turned to face his foe with a leveled pistol.

As Dennis reached him, he fired.

The Irishman was staggered by the shot, but hesitated only a second.

He brought down his rifle with crushing force on

the head of the negro, shattering the stock, and knocking him down.

As the man strove to rise, he struck him again with the broken weapon.

A cry from Kitty turned his attention in another direction.

The negro he had fired at had been merely stunned for an instant.

Gaining his feet at that critical moment, he sprung upon the white man with his knife.

Dennis turned at Kitty's cry, and received the blow of the knife on his shoulder.

Again he raised the barrel of his rifle; but his antagonist grappled with him before he could strike. As Dennis had been badly wounded, and was already weakened by the loss of blood, he stood little chance in that struggle.

"Run, Kitty! Run!" he cried, with his failing breath.

But Zeke Tibbles, coming on with long strides, like a panther leaping to the defense of its young, had already reached the spot.

Placing his pistol directly against the head of the negro who was struggling with Dennis, he fired, and Caleb was no longer of any value to any earthly master.

Nero, whose hard head had successfully withstood the Irishman's furious blows, jumped up and ran away, followed by a bullet from the overseer that made him limp.

Dennis, losing consciousness, had dropped upon the ground, and Kitty, throwing herself down at his side burst into an agony of tears.

"Oh, father, he is murdered!" she sobbed. "He was fighting to save me, and he fought so bravely. If he is dead, it will kill me!"

"I hope he ain't bad hurt," answered the overseer. "Be a woman, Kitty. Stand what yew have ter stand, and dew the best yew kin. Call some of the niggers from the quarters, and git him inside. I must run up to the haouse and help the folks there."

But when he reached the house the fight was over. The men from the neighboring plantations had arrived, and the Moccasins, or as many of them as were able to do so, had decamped.

As soon as possible Zeke Tibbles told Fred Henning of what had happened to his friend, and Fred hastened to the cottage with him.

Kitty had displayed praiseworthy energy and nerve in caring for the wounded man, having half-persuaded and half-forced the frightened negroes to carry him into her father's house.

When he was laid on a bed, the sight of the blood and his unconscious condition overcame her, and she was as helpless as he was in the hands of the servants.

Flush Fred hastily opened his friend's clothes, and discovered that he had a serious pistol-shot wound in his side, as well as a bad cut on the shoulder.

After stopping the flow of blood as well as he could, he poured some brandy down the throat of the wounded man, who soon recovered consciousness.

"Where's Kitty?" were the first words he uttered.

Kitty, who had come out of her swoon, hastened to show herself to him.

"You are badly hurt, my boy," said Fred.

"But I've learned somethin'," faintly answered Dennis.

"What is that?"

"One naygur is harder to kill than half a dozen Irishmen."

CHAPTER XXXI.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

THE account of stock taken after the battle of Gravelly Bayou showed a serious array of casualties on both sides.

If the assailants had been properly led, and had kept together, and had been fairly well armed, not a white man would have been left alive at the Delarosse mansion.

As it was, it had been touch and go with them, and they had suffered severely.

Four of the negroes were dead in the house, one at the foot of the steps that led up to the back porch, and one near Zeke Tibbles's cottage.

One who had been captured, pretty badly wounded, proved to be Jim, the young man who had helped Kate Helmsley to escape from the island.

Another, slightly wounded in the leg, was Nero, one of the plantation rebels.

Saul Stiner was the only one of the white men who had not got a scratch.

General Brayham had received a flesh wound and a few contusions, and Fred Henning's left shoulder had been scratched by Paul Delarosse's bullet.

But the wounds which Leon Delarosse had received were the most severe and serious.

Jonas Hexamer had struck with the intention of making a sure thing of the object of the attack, as far as he was concerned.

When Doctor Addis arrived and examined the old gentleman's wounds, he shook his head sadly.

The assassin's knife at one thrust had penetrated his lung, and the other stab was nearly as bad.

The opinion of the physician, as privately expressed to General Brayham and Fred Henning, was by no means encouraging.

"If Mr. Delarosse were a younger and stronger man," said he, "there might be some hope for him; but at his time of life those wounds may be expected to kill him. Under favorable conditions of weather and care he may cling to life a week or so, or he may drop off very shortly. I would not engage to keep him in this world for any specified length of time."

Leon Delarosse insisted upon being informed of what he had to expect, and the physician was obliged to give him substantially the same opinion which he had given the others.

"If you have any affairs that you want to put in order," said Doctor Addis, "you had better attend to them while you can."

"Very well," answered the old gentleman. "I will try to neglect nothing that I ought to do."

Fred Henning broke this sad news to Mrs. Brayham and Kate Helmsley, who had been directed to remain a while longer in the room where they had taken refuge, as it was feared that the shocking sights then visible about the house would be too much for their nerves.

"Do you suppose, Mr. Henning," inquired Kate,

"that Jonas Hexamer and those black people were trying to capture me again? If I have brought this trouble upon dear Mr. Delarosse and the rest of you, I shall never forgive myself for having existed."

"I believe that you have no cause to reproach yourself on that score," replied Fred. "It seems to me, from the best light I can get on the matter, that this blow was struck at Mr. Delarosse, personally. I judge that Hexamer was determined to kill him, and that the attack was made for that purpose. What is the reason of his spite against the old gentleman is more than I can imagine; but he must hate him with a deadly hatred, and it looks as if he had struck, a while ago, through you at Mr. Delarosse. This time he struck directly at the old gentleman."

"I would rather that he should strike through me at Mr. Delarosse," said Kate, "than through Mr. Delarosse at me."

"Well, we can't always manage such things to suit ourselves, and I must confess that there are some points in this game that are not yet clear to me. But there is one thing I am sure of, and that is that you ladies had better stay where you are until we get the muss in the house cleaned up. Then you may come and see the old gentleman and do all you can for him."

The "muss" of which Fred spoke was the bodies of the slain negroes, and various pools and splashes of blood, which made the mansion look like a slaughter-house.

He got through with the sickening task as speedily as possible, with the help of Zeke Tibbles and the servants, General Brayham having been compelled to take to his bed, and Saul Stiner having gone away with Satan as soon as the conflict was ended.

The neighbors were profuse in offers of assistance, and a few of them remained at Gravelly Bayou to help take care of the wounded; but of course they could not be expected to act as scavengers.

As soon as Dr. Addis had done what he could for Leon Delarosse, he was taken to the overseer's cottage to inspect the condition of Dennis Malone.

He found Dennis in need of surgical care, but was soon able to report that his wounds were not fatal, nor could they be considered dangerous, except under very unfavorable conditions.

"Fortunately no vital organ has been touched," said he, "and the hole through the body and the cut on the shoulder will heal in good time, with proper attention. Youth and a good constitution will pull this patient through, though it may be quite a while before he will be able to leave this bed."

When the physician had dressed his wounds and gone away, Dennis beckoned to Fred to come nearer, and whispered to him:

"It's the lucky b'ye that I am, Fred. This is the best thing as could ha' happened me."

"Why so?"

"I'll be here wid Kitty. They won't dare to move me—will they?"

"No. I will speak to Dr. Addis, and get him to give strict orders that you are not to stir from here."

"Yez tumble to me racket, thin. It's a jewel yez are, Fred, an' I'm glad I shtuck to yez."

As soon as the house was put in a decent condition, Fred Henning went in to see Mr. Delarosse, as the old gentleman had sent for him.

He found the wounded man very weak, but passably free from pain, with a clear head, and with a due sense of his impending fate and of all his responsibilities.

He first asked about Dennis Malone, and expressed his thankfulness when he was informed that the young Irishman was doing finely and likely soon to get well of his wounds.

"But you must not talk much, Mr. Delarosse," said Fred. "Dr. Addis was particular in giving that order."

"I won't talk much. I know what I can stand as well as the doctor does. But there is one thing that I want to speak to you about. That nephew of mine—I understand that he cut a good figure in the fight."

"How did you hear that, sir?"

General Brayham told me that he saw Paul down stairs in the thick of it, handling his revolver like a man, and the general admitted that he was surprised, as he had not expected that of him."

Fred said nothing.

"I had him in here a while ago," continued the old gentleman, "and complimented him on his conduct. He was quite modest about it, only saying that he had tried to do his best."

Fred had been pondering the matter, and had come to the conclusion that it was best to speak plainly.

"It was as well that he should be modest," said Fred. "I suppose you want the truth, Mr. Delarosse."

"Of course I do. That is what I always expect to get from you."

"That is what you will get, as far as I know it," said Fred, and he turned his left shoulder toward the bed. "Do you see this hole in my coat?"

"Yes."

"There is a wound under it, but a slight one—nothing worth speaking of. It was made by a bullet from the pistol which your nephew was handling so manfully."

"What! Do you mean to say that he shot at you?"

"I mean to say that he fired but two shots, and at that time the man at whom he said he was firing was down. One of his bullets struck the wall close to my head, and the other made this hole in my coat. He was handling his revolver so badly that I felt compelled to knock him down and take it away from him. If I had not been delayed in that way, I could have come to your help sooner than I did. Did he tell you about that?"

"Not he. He took my compliment as if he deserved it. That will do, Henning. I thought I saw a glimmer of light for the lad; but it is out now."

"I am sorry that I should have been the one to put it out, sir; but the truth ought to be told."

"I understand it. I know something more about him, Fred, which I have not told you yet."

"Don't try to tell it now, sir. You have talked too much. I will send Miss Helmsley in to sit with you, with instructions to keep you quiet."

CHAPTER XXXII.

PLEADING FOR A LIFE.

THE Gravelly Bayou plantation had become a hospital.

Dr. Addis spent as much of his time there as he could spare from his other patients, and, in fact, made it his temporary residence.

Kate Helmsley was assiduous and unwearied in her attentions to Leon Delarosse, and Mrs. Brayham busied herself in assisting and directing the servants to prepare nourishing food for the invalids.

Paul Delarosse, encouraged by his uncle's compliment, occasionally boasted of the part he had taken in the fight; but Fred Henning caught him at it, and gave him such a look as caused him thereafter to keep silence on that subject.

Then he went about the house as he had done before the attack, sulky and silent, but watching eagerly for bits of news from his uncle's bedside.

As for Dennis Malone, he needed nothing more in the way of care and attention than he got at the overseer's house.

He had Kitty, and Kitty had him.

Kitty was most devoted in her attention to him, anticipating his wants, and doing everything that could comfort or please him.

Her father, as a matter of course, knew of this, and knew that a great part of Kitty's time was spent with the invalid Irishman; but he made no objection by word or act to that state of affairs.

How could he?

Malone was his guest, and had been wounded in defense of his daughter, and at last had a strong claim upon his forbearance.

Dennis was justified in regarding himself as in possession of a thrifty and delightful clover patch.

As the days went on Paul Delarosse grew more sulky and morose, and with good reason, as the reports that came from his uncle's sick chamber were not calculated to cheer him.

Leon Delarosse did not sink as rapidly as he was expected to.

Indeed, he did not perceptibly grow worse.

It could not be said that he was improving; but it was something to know that he was not visibly failing.

Dr. Addis gave no hope of his recovery.

That, he said, must be considered out of the question; but he admitted that he was surprised at the tenacity with which the patient was holding on to life.

The old gentleman was probably quite as well acquainted with his own condition as Dr. Addis was.

He did not expect to live, and appreciated the change that must soon come to him, as well as certain responsibilities that were then pressing upon him.

He took great delight in the company of Kate Helmsley, and the presence of Fred Henning always seemed to cheer and strengthen him.

There was one thing he insisted on, and that was that a lawyer should be sent for; and a messenger was dispatched to Vidalia for that purpose.

He had already told Fred of the interview at which he had forced a partial confession from Paul, and the young man was able to enter into his feelings pretty fully.

"I am going to make a new will," he said. "I do not yet know what I shall do for Paul. Bad as he is and little as he cares for me, he is my nephew and I must do something for him. Perhaps it may be something in the way of a trustee. I must ask the lawyer about that."

The lawyer did not come when the old gentleman expected him, and the anxiety and worry of waiting aggravated his symptoms considerably.

General Brayham had been compelled to go to bed after the fight to nurse the flesh-wound in his leg, but they had not been able to keep him there more than a couple of days.

While Leon Delarosse was failing under nervous excitement, the old hero was up and limping about the house and grounds, making himself generally useful and agreeable.

One of those mornings, as he was sauntering about the place for air and exercise, he walked through the garden and the shrubbery until he brought up at the summer-house across the little brook.

This building—if it could be called a building—was so far from the house and so inconvenient of access that it had been little used of late years, and no care or attention had been given it.

Thus it had become overgrown by unpruned vines until it presented the appearance of a mass of foliage.

Of course the interior, though dilapidated, was shady and pleasant; and General Brayham, wearied by his walk, was glad to step in and rest.

As he did so, an aged negro woman, who had been watching him from among the shrubbery, walked up to the summer-house.

At the same time a young man, who had been watching the black woman, stealthily approached the same spot.

The young man was Paul Delarosse.

The woman was skinny and wrinkled, and was attired in a jumble of rags that only a stretch of courtesy could call a gown.

Her appearance at the entrance of the summer-house startled General Brayham, who rose to face the intruder.

But there was clearly no harm to be apprehended from that old woman, and he resumed his seat.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he demanded.

"I see come from de swamp whar Miss Kate was, an' my name's Dinah."

"I know you. That is, I have heard of you. You must be tired after your tramp. Come in here and sit down."

General Brayham, like all truly brave men, was courteous to the oldest and the poorest, especially if they were women.

On this occasion he had a further reason for courtesy, as there was a chance to get some valuable information from his visitor.

"I am afraid that you are a sort of suspicious character, Dinah," he pleasantly remarked. "But you are too old to be bothered by anybody, and I don't propose to trouble you. What can I do for you?"

"I knows you, General Brayham," answered the

old woman. "I knows you to be a good an' kin' man, w'ot ain't hard on pore an' 'pressed people, eben w'en dey's done gone wrong. Dat's why I come to you, to ax you 'bout my boy, Jim."

"Your boy, Jim?"

"Yes, sah. Him dat was cotched w'en dem cusses frum de swamp raised de debbil 'bout yar. I heerd dat he was bad hurt."

"Yes, Dinah, he was badly hurt, and that is how he happened to get caught."

"W'ot's been done to him, sah?"

"Nothing but good, so far. He has been in the doctor's care, the same as the rest of us, and will soon be cured. We have taken pains to get him well, so that he may be ready for the hangman's rope, or whatever fate awaits him."

"Does you allow to hang him, then, Mars'r Brayham?"

"There can be no doubt that he deserves hanging."

"Dat's a fac', sah. I hain't got a good word to say fur none ob dem cusses. But I don't want my Jim to be hung."

"No?"

"He's my baby, Mars'r Brayham."

"A big baby, and a dangerous one, too."

"But Jim's my baby. I see had lots o' chillun, an' dey's all dead or sold an' scattered off. All but Jim. He's de las', an' de baby. I can't b'ar to lose Jim."

"Do you think of what he has done, Dinah—he and the rest of them? Mr. Delarosse, one of the best men in this world, is dying. Another good man was nearly sent over the river, and I have been laid up with a hole in my leg. Do the wretches who worked so much harm to people who never harmed them deserve any mercy?"

"Hangin' 'ud be too good fur 'em, sah," sobbed old Dinah. "But, ef you'll let my Jim off, he'll go back to de Brenner place, w'ot he 'longs to, an' work faithful ez long ez he lives. He'll nebbber be cotched in anoder scrape."

"Why did you not keep him out of this one?"

"Dat debbil ob a white man filled him up wid liquor, an' 'ticed him off."

General Brayham shook his head as if to indicate that there was no hope for the captive.

"Twas me dat got Miss Kate off de islan' in de swamp," persisted Dinah. "Twas my Jim dat kerried her over to de sho'. 'Twas Jim dat fought fur her w'en a crazy nigger was pitchin' at her. Reckon she mus' ha' tole yer 'bout dat. Ef I could see Miss Kate, I know she would speak a good word for Jim."

"She has told us all about that, and she has spoken many good words for him."

"An' it's all no good?"

"There is the law, you know. He must answer to the law."

The old woman meditated for a moment, and then returned to the charge.

"You w'ite folks make de law an' manage de law, General Brayham. You's de law, yo'selves. S'posin', now, dat ole Dinah could tell you somefin' ob de biggest kin' o' portance."

"Importance to whom?" inquired the general, pricking up his ears.

His judgment had not been at fault. There was information to be got out of the old woman.

"Ob de biggest kin' o' 'portance to Mars'r Delarosse an' his folks."

"What is it, Dinah?"

"Somefin' 'bout dat young chap as calls hisself de ole gen'leman's nephew—Paul Delarosse."

"Now your talk amounts to something, Dinah. But you must stick to it. If you can tell me anything about that young man that is of such importance as you say it is, I promise you that your Jim shall not be hurt, provided that he will go back where he belongs."

"Den my baby's safe!" joyfully exclaimed the old woman.

"But you must prove what you say, Dinah."

"Ob, I'll 'tend to all dat."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DINAH'S REVELATION.

GENERAL BRAYHAM listened eagerly to old Dinah's confident declarations.

He no longer had any doubt that he was on the track of something of real interest and importance.

Quite as eagerly, but by no means as hopefully, did Paul Delarosse listen, crouched on the ground at the back of the summer-house, concealed from view by the masses of foliage.

"I am ready to hear what you have to tell me," said the general, after he had waited a little while for the old woman to begin her revelation.

Then she dashed into it off-hand.

Dat black-faced young chap, general, w'ot Mars'r Leon Delarosse fotched home frum furren parts, an' w'ot passes hisself off as de ole gen'leman's nephew, ain't no ways related to him, an' nebbber was."

Whatever General Brayham had expected to hear, it was not this, and the statement startled him; but he retained his composure.

"That is very important," said he, "if it is true."

"It's de gossippil troof, sah, an' I see ready to swar it on a stack o' Bibles."

"That would hardly be enough."

"But de ole gen'leman's brudder, David Delarosse, is libbin' yet, an' so's his son."

"How do you know that, Dinah?"

"I see 'd 'em bofe, sah."

"When?"

"Not long ago."

"Where?"

"Not fur frum yar."

"Tell me where they are to be found."

"I can't do dat, general, 'ca'se dey wouldn't let me. Sides dat, it's likely dey's bofe yar away frum yar now. Mars'r Dave tole me he was gwine ter light out. But befo' he went he gi'n me dis yar paper, an' said I mought use it if folks wouldn't take my word. Does yer know Mars'r Dave's handwrite, general?"

The old woman fumbled among her rags and drew forth a folded paper, which General Brayham eagerly seized.

As he ran his eye over it a look of exultation lighted up his rugged features.

"This will do, Dinah," said he. "This proves the

truth of your story. You have earned what you ask, and shall have it. Your boy Jim will not be hurt. Come up to the house, and call for me there, and I will see that you are well cared for, and you shall yourself carry the news to Jim."

"All right, sah. I don't nebbber want to go back to dat swamp no mo'."

General Brayham hastily left the summer-house; but another had started before him.

Paul Delarosse, as soon as he had taken in the full meaning and effect of old Dinah's revelation, arose from the ground behind the summer-house, and ran home at the top of his speed, reaching his destination when General Brayham had hardly started.

The veteran limped away as fast as his lame leg would let him travel, and was quite wearied and out of breath when he reached the house.

But he was full of the importance of what he had heard, and anxious to communicate it immediately to the person who was most deeply interested in it.

He hastened into the room where Leon Delarosse lay, but sunk upon a chair when he got there, unable to speak at the moment.

Kate Helmsley was at the bedside with Dr. Addis, and Fred Henning stood near.

"What is the matter, general?" inquired Fred. "Has anything unusual happened?"

"News—very important—" gasped the veteran. "I hope we are not going to have another fight on our hands."

"Better than that. It is about that young scallawag who calls himself Paul Delarosse."

The general's tone and style of speaking instantly awakened the attention of the invalid.

"What's that?" he sharply asked. "What have you got hold of, Brayham? Come here and tell me about it. Kate, get him a glass of wine. You may bring me a little, too."

The wine revived the veteran's energies and loosened his tongue.

He gave a brief account of his interview with old Dinah, and repeated her declaration concerning Paul just as she had made it to him.

"And here is a letter from your brother David, confirming her statements," he continued, "It is dated only yesterday."

"Mr. Delarosse must not read that long letter," put in Doctor Addis. "It would be too much of an effort for him. You had better read it to him, general."

"Very well," said the sick man. "But you may let me look at the signature."

It was shown to him, and he was satisfied.

"That is David's hand," said he. "Now you may go on, Brayham."

General Brayham read the letter, which was in these words:

"BROTHER LEON:—

"I have no wish to inflict myself upon you in any shape.

"We have got on better apart than when we were together, and it is well that we should stay apart.

"But, for the sake of the family name, in which I still take just a little pride, I cannot bear to see you imposed upon, as you now are, by a scamp who has succeeded in passing himself off upon you as your nephew, Paul Delarosse.

"You have only one nephew, and that is my son, Paul Delarosse, who is living, is with me at this writing, and expects to remain with me.

"The other fellow, therefore, is a fraud.

"Let me say right here, but without the least ill feeling, that I and my son want nothing from your estate, and will take nothing. We have enough of our own.

"Whatever disposition you may see fit to make of your property must be made without reference to either of us.

"If you should leave any part of it to us, or it should fall to us in any way, we would never touch it.

"We are both of one mind in regard to this matter and Paul indorses every word I say here.

"You will naturally want to know who the fellow is whom you have been persuaded to adopt as your nephew, and I am prepared to tell you.

"When I heard that you were being victimized, I set out to learn who it was that had imposed upon you, and how the trick had been played.

"My success was easier and speedier than I had expected it to be.

"The young man whom you have known as Paul Delarosse is the son of Dick Ennis, whom you ought to remember, as he was our overseer when we were together, and was discharged by you for reasons of your own.

"Afterward he fell in with me abroad, and associated with me in certain affairs which I need not specify here.

"He had reason to believe, I suppose, that Paul and I were both dead, and conceived the plan of passing off his boy for Paul.

"In that he was probably aided by some papers that I left in his care, and you know how well he succeeded.

"Perhaps I ought also to inform you that he followed you from Europe, and has for some time been figuring in your neighborhood under the name of Jonas Hexamer.

"I have written this to please myself, to say nothing of serving the cause of justice, and have given it to an old black woman for whom I have a kindly feeling.

"I hope that it may help her to gain her wish, as well as that it may enlighten you.

"Whatever you may think of me, you know that I would not lie to you.

"I intend to leave the place where this is written immediately, and when you receive these lines I shall be far from here.

"I hope that you will live, and that you will forget me and mine.

"DAVID DELAROSSE."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"THAT SETTLES IT."

"THAT settles it," said Leon Delarosse, when General Brayham had finished reading the paper.

"You must not talk any more," interposed Dr. Addis. "You are now too much excited."

"Just a word. You don't know how this has helped me, doctor. I feel so greatly relieved. Such a weight has been lifted from my mind. That young

man was so unlike my brother David that it seemed strange to me that he should be his son. Now it is all explained. He is nothing to me, and has not the slightest claim upon me. Quite the contrary. I am very thankful that I learned the truth before it was too late. Henning, you will greatly oblige me if you will go and see whether that young man is in the house."

"You must not have him in here to excite you," ordered Dr. Addis.

"I don't want him to come in here, I only want to know."

Fred Henning returned after a while with the intelligence that the *ci-devant* Paul Delarosse was nowhere about the premises.

He had come running to the house an hour or so ago, from the direction of the garden, and had hastened to his room.

Shortly he had come down-stairs, carrying a bundle, and had left the house without saying a word to anybody, and no person knew whither he had gone.

"He must have overheard something, Brayham, either here or yonder," said Mr. Delarosse.

"It looks as if he had got a hint, somehow. I think he has cleared out."

"It is better so. Nobody here will care to find him and bring him back. I feel much better, doctor, though I know that I am not long for this world. All I want now is to see that lawyer."

"Another messenger has been sent to Vidalia," answered Dr. Addis. "I wish you would not worry about it."

"Oh, I am not worrying now."

Old Dinah came up to the house, and was provided with good quarters by the direction of General Brayham, who gave orders that all her wants should be supplied.

The lawyer from Vidalia at last arrived, and Leon Delarosse was engaged with him for quite a while, Dr. Addis remaining in the room to take care that his patient should not overdo himself.

At the close of the conference he was ordered to rest, as he was failing rapidly, and it was the physician's duty to husband his remaining strength.

The next morning he sent for Kate Helmsley and Fred Henning, and Dr. Addis brought them to his bedside.

"I have been making a new will," said he.

"You ought not to worry yourself by talking about your affairs," protested Kate.

"But this is a matter that concerns you—both of you—and I want to speak to you about it. I know that I must soon leave you; but my mind is easy now, and I am more content to die than I would have been before the disclosure that was made yesterday. I was haunted by the thought that it was my duty to provide for a person who was in every way distasteful to me. But he has been proved to be a swindler, and I am rid of that affliction."

"If you keep on as you have begun, you will talk yourself to death," suggested the physician.

"I like to congratulate myself. The thought that I have been permitted to outlive and correct that great mistake is very pleasant to me. As I was saying, I have made a new will, and am thoroughly satisfied with it."

"I have left all that I possess in two undivided portions."

"Half of it is to go to one who has greatly cheered and brightened my latter days—my dear friend's daughter, Kate Helmsley."

"The other half is to become the property of as brave and true and good a man as I ever met, whom I have been proud to call my friend—Fred Henning."

"Some of my neighbors might find fault with me for splitting the estate; but I have done so in the hope that those who are to inherit it may see fit to join the severed parts by becoming man and wife."

"Old as I am, I have not lost my interest in young folks and their ways, and I feel that there is ground for my hope."

Fred Henning cast a quick and eager glance at Kate, who blushed and looked down.

Then she fell on her knees at the bedside, and burst into tears.

"What is the matter, my dear?" asked the old gentleman, as he laid his thin hand on her head. "I hope I have not done anything to trouble you."

"Oh, no," she sobbed. "I am grieved to feel that you must leave us. You have been so good to me, and I have learned to love you so much, and I have brought nothing to you but pain and death. Here you lie, murdered, and it is all because I came here."

"No, no, Kate. You are entirely mistaken. It is on my account that you have been persecuted. I see it all plainly now. All the harm that was done to you and me was meant to help that swindler. They wanted to kill me while his position was believed to be secure. You must not allow such thoughts to worry you. I have lost a nephew, but have gained a dear daughter, if not a son."

He extended his hand to Fred Henning, who pressed it gently.

"The hope I spoke of," continued the old gentleman, "I have mentioned in my will; but it is not a condition, and you are both free to do as you please. You may go now, Fred, and leave Kate with me. Her presence is very soothing to me."

After Leon Delarosse had made his will, and had made its provisions known to those who were to be benefited by it, he sunk rapidly, passing peacefully into the unknown world.

On the third day he died, parting with his life easily and tranquilly, his last words breathing kindness to Kate and thoughtfulness for her future.

Then the Gravelly Bayou mansion became a house of mourning.

There was not a person on the plantation—except, perhaps, the prisoner Nero, but not excepting old Dinah's son Jim—who did not mourn his loss as that of a true and generous friend, or a kind and liberal master.

The estimation in which he was held by the planters and others in the vicinity was proved by the large attendance at his funeral, and by the expressions of sorrow for his loss that came from all sorts and conditions of people.

At the same time there was expressed a general resolve on the part of the community to hunt down the murderer and make him pay the penalty of his crime.

The fraudulent nephew did not venture to present himself at the funeral.

In fact, nothing had been seen of him by any of the people at Gravelly Bayou since his sudden exit from the house at the time of the exposure of his false pretensions.

It had been discovered that he had carried away a portion of his clothing, as well as all the valuables of which he was possessed.

His departure grieved nobody, and nobody showed the least desire for his return; but it was natural to wonder what had become of him.

"I think he has gone to join his father," said Fred Henning, in reply to one of General Brayham's suggestions. I don't know where else he would be likely to go to. It is probable that they have both left the country before now."

"We must make sure of that, though."

"Yes; we owe it to the memory of our dead friend to move in that matter."

After the funeral Kate Helmsley thought it proper that she should leave Gravelly Bayou and take up her residence with Mrs. Brenner.

As Mrs. Brayham was of the same opinion, and Mrs. Brenner was pressing in her importunities, she prepared to go, Mrs. Brenner coming in her own conveyance to bring her away.

It had been arranged by General Brayham, who was the executor of the will of Leon Delarosse, that the Gravelly Bayou property should remain for the present under the care and control of Fred Henning.

So it was that Kate, when she went away, had a parting word to say to him on that subject.

"As you are to be left in charge," said she, "I hope you will take good care of my share of the property."

"I promise you that I will take as good care of your share as of my own," replied Fred.

"Well, I don't see how you can help doing that, as you would find it impossible to distinguish between my share and yours."

"For my part, I have no wish to separate them. To satisfy you that I am doing the fair thing, I will ride over and report to you every day."

"That would never do. You would have no time left to take care of the property."

"But I must come and report."

"You ought to, I should say, but not quite every day."

As Fred was looking mournfully after the departing carriage, General Brayham slapped him on the shoulder.

"When are you going to marry that girl, Henning?" demanded the veteran.

"I don't know. I wish I did know. I wish I knew whether I am ever to marry her."

"Are you not fond of her?"

"Immensely."

"And she is fond of you."

"Do you think so, general?"

"It is easy enough to see that. Have you never asked her?"

"No, indeed."

"Why not?"

"I am afraid."

"Come, now, Henning, that won't do. You pass for a brave man, and I have reason to believe that you are brave."

"Perhaps I am, after a fashion; but I must confess that I am not brave in that way. I have not met Miss Helmsley here for the first time, general. I became acquainted with her at her home in Tennessee, and I knew then that she was the only woman in the world to me. But she came of a good and proud family, while I was worse than nobody—a river gambler. I could not hope to win her, and I went away from her. But fate has thrown us together again, and now we are tied up in the will of our dead friend."

"Just so, and the gambling business need no longer stand in your way, as you are well out of that."

"But, general, if I should speak to her now, she might feel herself, as I may say, under the compulsion of the will."

"Nonsense! You will be a fool, to speak plainly, if you don't make a break and get her while you can."

"That settles it, then. I should hate to be considered a fool as well as a coward."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A SIEGE IN A SWAMP.

BEFORE Fred Henning could muster up courage enough to "make a break," a matter of such importance that it could not be neglected claimed his attention.

This was nothing less than the pursuit and capture of Jonas Hexamer.

After the funeral of Leon Delarosse the planters of the vicinity had organized themselves into a vigilance committee for the purpose of hunting down the murderer of their old neighbor and friend.

They had made careful investigations at all the landings within a range of twenty miles up and down the river, and along all the roads that led from Gravelly Bayou in any direction.

They could not discover from these inquiries that either Jonas Hexamer or Paul Delarosse—to give them the names by which they had thus far been known—had left that part of the country by any traveled route.

Consequently it was at least possible that they were still in the vicinity, and the searchers scoured the forests and swamps in all directions in the hope of finding them.

Jack Poindexter was the man who first got track of them, and it was he who brought the news to Gravelly Bayou.

He had made it his task to watch the island in the swamp which had been the refuge of the Moccasins, scouting and spying about there both day and night.

His patient vigilance had at last been rewarded by a sight of Paul, and afterward he had seen Hexamer there.

A party had been at once made up to go into the swamp to capture them, and young Poindexter had come to Gravelly Bayou to invite Fred Henning to join the party.

"It is strange that they are here yet," said Fred. "I should suppose that they would both have made the best time they could in getting out of the country."

"Perhaps they have not been able to get away," suggested Poindexter. "The Hexamer scoundrel looked to me as if he was sick, or had been sick. I was near enough to him to kill him in his tracks, but did not do so as we want to save him for the rope. From his condition, as it appeared to me, we ought to be able to take him easily enough."

"I am not sure of that. I am inclined to believe that he will fight as long as there is breath in his body. But we must go and get him."

Poindexter's had been appointed as the starting-place for the expedition, and Flush Fred rode over there the next morning, armed and equipped as the occasion required.

Dennis Malone was anxious to go; but he was not yet permitted to get away from the care of Kitty, though he could sit up and walk about a little.

Dinah's Jim would have been willing to act as guide to the intricacies of the swamp; but he, also, was not yet in a condition for such service.

At Poindexter's Fred found twenty men assembled—men of the sort by which one would wish to be backed in any dangerous undertaking.

All were armed with rifles, and they only awaited the arrival of Fred Henning to start for the swamp.

"There seem to be enough of us," remarked Fred, as he cast his eyes over this formidable array.

"In numbers there is strength," replied Major Poindexter, who had been chosen as the leader of the band. "We don't want to miss any chances, and we ought to have enough men to guard all the points of escape. You know, Mr. Henning, that two men, well posted, can make a strong fight, and it is quite likely that we may find a few of those runaway niggers at the point we are aiming for."

"No doubt you are right, major. It is a good thing to have plenty of men, and at the same time it is a good thing to act quickly."

"That is just what we mean to do, and I think you will see that we won't get in the way of each other."

They made good time to the swamp, and when they reached the lagoon Major Poindexter's plan was speedily developed.

He stationed about half of his force at various points in the swamp, so that they could command the island with their rifles from all directions.

The remainder he kept together for the purpose of a direct attack.

Then came the question of reaching the objective point of the expedition.

The island lay in the middle of the dark and still lagoon, at close range for rifles, but decidedly difficult of access.

It was known by Kate's account of her arrival and departure that there was a portion of the lagoon where the Moccasins had been accustomed to wade without difficulty in passing to and from the island; but the careful search of the white men failed to discover it.

The water, as far as they could see, was too deep for wading, with a bottom that was very soft and uncertain, to say nothing of the reptiles with which the swamp abounded.

It was the current belief that between [a snake of the water moccasin variety and a runaway negro there existed such a sympathy that neither of them would hurt the other; but the white men had no cause to consider themselves similarly protected by Providence.

To bring skiffs from the bayou it would have been necessary to cut a road for hauling them to the lagoon, and that would have been a work of no little time and labor.

Major Poindexter had considered the question carefully before he started.

From his son Jack's report he had got a pretty good idea of the island and the lagoon around it, and had formed his conclusions accordingly.

Several of the men were armed with axes, as well as with rifles, and the axes were speedily brought into play.

A point was selected that was as near to the island as any, where two tall cypress trees were growing close together.

Axmen were set at work to cut down the two trees so that they would fall into the water in the direction of the island.

At the same time men were stationed near them with cocked rifles, to watch the island closely and guard them against attack.

Up to this time there had been no sign of life on the island; but, when the work upon the trees began, a shot was fired from among the dense foliage over there, slightly wounding one of the axmen.

The shot was instantly replied to by at least half a dozen rifles, and nothing more was heard from that quarter for a while.

"They are there!" shouted Major Poindexter, and the knowledge of this fact spurred all the party to increased exertions.

Soon one of the tall cypresses fell, and then another.

This work had been done so carefully, and with such good judgment, that they fell side by side and close together, covering the greater part of the space between their stumps and the island.

When the axmen started out on the trunks to trim off the branches, the island woke up, and a vigorous attack was made upon the intruders.

To this the latter replied in such lively style that they kept up a continual cracking of rifles all about the island.

It did not take them long to discover who their opponents were, and how many there were of them.

"There's a nigger!" shouted Jack Poindexter, who was noted as being a very sharp-sighted young man.

"And there's Hexamer," said Fred Henning, the only one of the party who knew by sight the man they were pursuing.

It was evident that there were but two rifles in use on the island, and consequently Hexamer and the black were the only fighting men there.

But there could be no doubt that they meant to struggle to the last extremity.

One of the axmen was badly wounded; but the fire of one of the rifles on the island was soon silenced, and by the time the cypresses were trimmed there was no more firing from that quarter.

In the mean time other logs had been cut, which were speedily floated into position beyond the tops of the cypresses, making a rude bridge from the shore to the island.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A REDEEMING TRAIT.

THE leader gave the order to advance, and Jack Poindexter was the first man over the bridge, with Fred Henning close at his heels.

There was no opposition to their crossing, nor did they find any person to oppose them when they reached the island.

Near the shore, partly concealed by the trunk of a fallen tree, they found the body of the black man who had been fighting them.

There were three bullets in his body, and there could be no doubt that he had fought as long as he could lift his rifle.

But where was the white man? Where was Hexamer?

It was certain that he was there, and that Major Poindexter and his twenty men, who had all crossed over to the island, would soon unearth him.

Spotches of blood were soon found on the grass and leaves, at a little distance from where the black man lay, and from this spot extended a trail of blood that was easily followed.

It led the searchers to the smaller of two huts that stood near the eastern end of the island.

This was, in fact, the hut which Kate Helmsley had been compelled to occupy with old Dinah.

The door was open, but the interior of the novel was quite dark.

Yet, no sooner had Fred Henning thrust his head inside the door, than the report of a pistol broke the silence, and its flash lighted up the dark and dirty apartment.

By the flash Fred saw Paul Delarosse standing in front of a man who lay on the floor in a corner.

He sprung upon the young man as the pistol was vainly snapped again, and wrested the weapon from his hand.

"You sha'n't have him!" screamed Paul. "Don't touch him! You have shot him, and now he is dying. Leave him alone!"

He struggled so fiercely, screeching and scratching, and biting like a young wild-cat, that Fred was obliged to call on Jack Poindexter to help subdue him.

"I've a great mind to blow out the young rattle's brains if he's got any," said Jack.

"No!" exclaimed Flush Fred. "We ought not to hurt him. There is a redeeming trait in his character that I did not know he had. He has fought for his wounded father here, and we have no evidence that he has fought against us in any other way. I really did not think it was in him."

As much light as possible was let into the cabin, and Jonas Hexamer was plainly seen lying there, bathed in his own blood.

It was clear that he was fast losing his hold upon life; but he was bold and stubborn to the last.

"You got in too late," he said, faintly. "I will soon be beyond your reach."

A little sooner than he expected, perhaps.

Hardly had he spoken when he gasped convulsively, and his earthly career was ended.

Paul, who had sobered down when he perceived the uselessness of resistance, burst into tears.

When his paroxysm of grief had subsided, Fred Henning proceeded to question the young man.

"Is that man who is lying there Dick Ennis? and is he your father?"

"He was my father; but he is dead now."

"Yes, and he deserved to die a harder death. How did you and he happen to be here on this island? Tell me the truth now, if you want us to be merciful to you."

"I came here to him when I went away from Gravelly Bayou. I knew that he would be waiting here for news. I heard what the old woman said to General Bravham, and hurried here to tell him that the game was up."

"The story she told was true, then?"

"Don't you know it was? We would have been safe if we hadn't found out that David Delarosse and his son were living near here. They dropped on our game, and that was what knocked us."

"How did you learn that they were here?"

"He"—pointing at the dead man—"came upon it by accident."

"What names did they go by when they were here?"

"Don't you know? I thought you knew everything. They called themselves David Stiner and Saul Stiner."

"I thought so," said Fred. "But you have not told me why it was that we found you still here. I supposed that you would get out of the country when you knew that your game was up."

"We meant to; but he"—pointing at the dead man again—"was taken sick and was unable to move. Yesterday was the first day he was able to get about at all, and to-day we meant to go away. But you have stopped that."

"Yes, we stopped it. That is all I wanted to know. You must go with us peaceably, now, and we will soon decide what we shall do with you."

Graves were dug in the sandy soil of the island, and the bodies of the so-called Jonas Hexamer and the black refugee were hastily buried.

Then the huts were fired, and by the light of their burning the party crossed the bridge of cypresses, and set out to return to their homes.

The recent Paul Delarosse accompanied them quite submissively, and from Poindexter's he went with Henning to Gravelly Bayou, as it had been settled that that gentleman should decide what should be done with the young reprobate.

In Fred's opinion Kate Helmsley was entitled to have something to say in the settlement of that question, and he rode over to Mrs. Brenner's the next morning to report the capture to the young lady and consult her concerning it.

"Give him some money and send him away," was Kate's prompt reply.

"Then you want, according to the old saying, to heap coals of fire on his head," suggested Fred.

"No; I was thinking of the old saying about building a bridge of gold for a flying enemy."

"Perhaps that will be best. His father is dead, and he is likely to come to the gallows without any help from us."

"I do not wish him that fate. I hate him just enough to wish him well out of my way, and the further he is from here the better I will be pleased."

"Very well. I will do as you say."

"I have no money, and must ask you to provide it."

"I can do that. Your credit is good."

"Is there nothing else you wish to consult me about, Mr. Henning?"

"Nothing at present, I believe."

Again he went away without saying what he wanted to say, and feeling very much ashamed of himself.

He gave his prisoner a sum of money and told him to go to Martigny and take passage on the first steamboat down the river.

"This will take you to New Orleans," said he, "and keep you a while after you get there. If you want to go back to Europe, you can find a chance to work your passage. Anyhow, you must work, and I advise you to try to be honest."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

FLUSH FRED'S FULL HAND.

AFTER he had obeyed Kate Helmsley's instructions by building a bridge of gold for the young reprobate whom she had spoken of as a flying enemy, Flush Fred went to the overseer's cottage to report the success of the expedition to Dennis Malone.

He found Dennis seated in the shade near the house, smoking, quite at his ease, and evidently well satisfied with himself and his surroundings.

As far as his bodily condition was concerned there was no reason why he should not take up his quarters at the mansion; but his spiritual or emotional wants could be better supplied where he was, and Dr. Addis had been easily persuaded to order that he should remain there for the present.

He had already received a pretty good account of the siege of the swamp island and its result, and he congratulated Fred upon having got rid of the father and son who had made so much trouble for the people of Gravelly Bayou.

"And now, Fred," continued the jolly young Irishman, "whin is the beir goin' to marry the heiress?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Fred, suddenly becoming stupid.

"An' is it phwat do I mane? Sure an' yez know phwat I mane. Whin is Flush Fred Hennin' goin' to marry the lady of his love, Miss Kate Helmsley?"

"I don't know, Dennis. I don't suppose that I am ever to marry her at all. She has never said that she wanted to marry me."

"An' phwat w'u'd she be sayin' that fur? Is it her place thin? I hope yez haven't gone back on her, Fred."

"No, indeed."

"Phwat's to pay, thin? It can't be that yez niver axed her."

"Honestly, Dennis, I have never been able to get up the courage to do that."

The Irishman looked his friend over with a puzzled expression of countenance, and then put his wonder into words.

"Yez niver axed her. It's the quarest thing out, intirely. I've axed Kitty ag'in and ag'in, an' she's said yis as many times, an' it's only the ould mon that's in the way. But there's nothin' in your way, except—I say, Fred, yez w'u'dn't sthrike a cripple w'u'd yez?"

"Strike a cripple? Of course not."

"This I must free my mind an' abuse yez fur as big a fool as I've stepped in shoe-leather."

Fred turned away abruptly.

"Yez ain't goin' off mad, I hope?"

"I am not going off mad, but I am going off. This is the second time lately that I have been called a fool, and I believe I am a fool."

It was evident that he did not intend to lay himself liable to be called a fool any more, if a desperate resolve could prevent the application of that epithet.

He saddled a horse and rode to Mrs. Brenner's rapidly, so as not to give his resolve time to cool.

"You have returned very soon," said Kate. "I hope you have had no trouble with that young fellow."

"None at all," he answered. "He was glad enough to take the money and go away."

"Is it a business trouble, then, that has brought you back?"

"That is what it is—a matter of business. Will you walk out with me, and let me tell you about it?"

"Of course I will, though I would not have supposed that you would be so very particular about any mere matters of business that Mrs. Brenner could not hear of them."

Fred actually blushed, and Mrs. Brenner noticed it, if Kate did not.

They had hardly got outside of the house when he plunged into the subject abruptly, if not boldly.

"It's about your share of the estate over yonder Miss Helmsley."

"Dear me! What can be the matter with it now?"

"Nothing new. The fact is that I don't see my way clear to manage your share of the estate and my own."

"Indeed! I had thought that you could not take care of one part without taking care of the other."

"So it would seem; but this is a peculiar case. The two parts are so tangled up, and at the same time so separate, that they ought to be brought together. I think I must give you my share."

"Give me your share?" exclaimed Kate, in surprise.

"Yes, if you will take me with it."

If she blushed at this abrupt proposal, Fred Henning did not see the blush, as she turned away her head.

"Have you any special reason for wishing to part with so much valuable property?" she mildly inquired.

"Oh, Miss Helmsley!—Kate!—don't you know that I love you?"

He had done it; but the effort almost overcame him.

Bluffing on a bobtail flush was nothing to that.

As for Kate, she stood up for her side manfully, and proceeded to pull him through.

"It seems to me that I have known that for some time," she smilingly remarked.

"Have you? Oh, Kate!"

"Why, yes. Don't you suppose that I had eyes, as well as poor Mr. Delarosse? It would seem that I, who was so much more deeply interested than he, might see what he could easily see. It is you who have been blind."

"I have been called a coward and a fool, and now you tell me that I was blind."

"Indeed you were. If your eyes had been open, you could not have failed to see that I was very—very fond of you."

It was not such a terrible ordeal, after all; but Fred recognized the fact that he had been mercifully assisted.

He would have embraced her at the instant; but she waved him off.

"But how are we to settle the business matter that you spoke of?" she asked.

"If you do care for me, Kate, you will take my share of the property, and me with it."

"To make things even, then, I must give you my share and myself, and how will the business stand then?"

"Just as it ought to. Then we will be married, and will manage the estate together."

"Oh, that way! Well, Fred, as a matter of business—"

He did not allow her to make any clearly audible remarks for a while, and she went into the business of blushing.

"I would have spoken to you long ago," said Fred; "but I was afraid you would not listen to me, as I was what I was."

"You are not of that line of life now," she suggested.

"Yes; but you have dealt me a full hand, and I mean to bet on it as long as I live."

The marriage day was not fixed at that interview; but it was not long before the entire business was satisfactorily settled in the only practical manner, and Fred Henning and Kate Helmsley were made one, to match their joint estates.

Dennis Malone came in for a similar stock of felicity.

Zeke Tibbles had carefully taken his measure while he was an invalid, and had come to the conclusion, as he expressed it, that Dennis was "a raal good man, fur an Irishman."

He was obliged to recognize the fact that Dennis had fought bravely in defense of his daughter at the battle of Gravelly Bayou, and the further fact that Kitty's heart was completely in the young Irishman's possession.

He was assailed, also, by the advice and importunities of the new owners of the plantation, and it is no wonder that he yielded.

So Dennis made a trip to pick up the dropped stitches of his business, and on his return Kitty Tibbles became Kitty Malone, and was pleased with the change of name, as well as with the change of station.

Fred Henning and his wife, as master and mistress of the Gravelly Bayou estate, already had the respect and esteem of their neighbors, and speedily became immensely popular.

Old Dinah and her "baby" were annexed to the plantation, a lot with which they were well contented.

As for Nero, he was sent to New Orleans and sold—an operation which was at least more profitable than legal punishment.

THE END.

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